HAREKRUSHNA MAHTAB

Souribandhu Kar



Translated by
Suvash Chandra Satpathy

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National Biography

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Preface

It is very difficult to write the biography of a multifaceted personality like Dr Harekrushna Mahtab. He is regarded as a major figure in the Indian independence movement. He was one amongst the Oriya leaders who took part in the freedom struggle. After Gopabandhu, it was Mahtab who gave Congress inspiring leadership during the freedom movement.

Deeply inspired by the ideas espoused by Swami Vivekananda in his student days, Mahtab dedicated his life to the cause of serving the country and the people. An ardent follower of Gandhi, Mahtab made *Satyagraha* (love for truth) and non-cooperation the guiding principles of his life. These reflect dimensions of his strong personality and leadership.

Writing a biography of a great personality like Dr Mahtab proved a daunting task. It is true that several books have been published on his life. But, a holistic evaluation of his achievements has not been undertaken so far.

After I came to Bhubaneswar in 1968, I had had an opportunity of seeing him from a distance as well as from the close quarters. I had immense respect and love for him, which remains undiminished. To me, the Orissa we live in today is his contribution. The people of this land will remember forever the contribution he made to the integration of the feudatory states into Orissa.

When National Book Trust, India entrusted me with the task of writing a biography of Harekrushna Mahtab, I felt

very honoured although to write one was beyond my capacity. If a great man is being assessed in different ways and through varied methods, then an error-free synthesis should come out of that man's work and his personality. In today's political, social and cultural conditions, there is a great need for a careful study and analysis of Mahtab's thoughts and deeds. Keeping this in mind, I have tried to put this book together.

I am indebted to Prof. Manoranjan Mohanty of Delhi University for going through the manuscript and advising me to make certain changes in it. I am obliged to eminent poet and ex-chairman of National Book Trust, India, Sitakanta Mahapatra for taking the decision to publish this biography. I feel grateful to Bhatruhari Mahtab, Chairman of Prajatantra Prachar Samiti and Nrusimha Charan Sahu, Secretary, Mahtab Foundation, for their valuable suggestions. I express my sincere thanks to Manas Ranjan Mahapatra and Dr Pramod Sar of National Book Trust, India for taking a keen interest in the publication of this book. I hope readers will find this book useful.

SOURIBANDHU KAR

1

INTRODUCTION

As the confluence of Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati make *Prayag* the sacred place of Indian social life, the combination of literature, culture and politics in the life of Dr Harekrushna Mahtab glorified him as a great soul. Few people *suo moto* embrace the responsibility of leading the struggle by uniting the exploited and the hapless people. Because everyone knows that this world does not welcome anybody with their all-embracing hands. Yet, those who dare to lead this struggle, people of this world embrace them. Mahtab knew this from his very childhood. And he was prepared to meet this challenge.

The struggling life of Dr Harekrushna Mahtab is not only a historic document but a symbol of a dazzling institution preparing human beings for building a nation and leading people especially the people of Orissa towards the national independence.

Dr Mahtab's devoted life was full of hope, assurance and confidence. It is very difficult to write a book on this life. Yet this life has left an impact on every human being.

Biographical literature has a great significance, especially biographies of great souls who have motivated ordinary mortals to reach the pinnacle. Mahtab influenced the lives of those leaders who entered the post-independent social, political and cultural fields of Orissa.

Mahtab was born in Agarpada in Balasore district on 5 November 1899. His father was Krushna Charan Das and

mother was Tohfa Bibi. As the then Zamindar of Agarpada Jagannath Mahtab was issuless, Harekrushna was adopted by Jagannath's mother Dharni Bibi, when he was only seven months old and thus became the Zamindar of Agarpada. His father Krushna Charan became the Manager of Agarpada Zamindari.

During his student days Mahtab was deeply influenced by Swami Vivekananda and this helped him control and manage his life. As he says,

> When I was a student of class three, there occurred a famine in some parts of Bhadrak Sub-division. To open a free community kitchen, Swami Purnananda of Ramakrishna Mission visited our area and stayed for few months in our house. He gave me a copy of 'Immitation of Christ' to read. Thereafter, I was attracted towards Swami Vivekananda and Sri Ramakrishna's ideals such as serving the poor, being courageous, renouncing luxury life which influenced me to such an extent, that, I believe, I have been walking along the same path till date. During that time I read all works of Vivekananda. I understood some writings and some were beyond my comprehension. Yet these writings motivated me to do public service and serve the nation. By the time I passed the matriculation exams, my mind was set in the proper direction.

Inspired by Swami Vivekananda, Mahtab adopted his vision as the ideal of his own life. A sad incident of his life also led him to be inspired by Swami Vivekananda. While he was a student of Bhadrak High School, his mother died. It was beyond his imagination that his mother's affection towards him would come to such an abrupt end. He started thinking about his mother all the time. Even after returning to Bhadrak there was no respite from this. During that time the soothing words of the Saints of the Ramakrishna Mission

and the immortal words of Swami Vivekananda gave him solace and strength. He writes,

> At that time Swami Brahmananda and Swami Shankarananda were staying for some time in Bhadrak. I regularly visited them. They were very affectionate towards me and talked on various topics. In course of our discussion, Swami Brahmananda explained to me the theory of illusion. Who is mother, who is father, who is a friend? The existence of the Almighty is shrouded in mystery and is all pervading. And, then, I found some solace by reading the writings of Swami Vivekananda. I have to proceed suppressing my sorrows and bursts of happiness within me. I have to march on....

The blow that he had received, gave him enough strength to resolve and face the worldly difficulties with a detachment. So, whenever a marriage proposal came, a strange trouble engulfed his mind.

Swami Vivekananda's inspiration of intense desire to do something for the motherland and to lead a different kind of life, had filled his mind. "How could all these feelings be wiped out? Learning a little English, I would be sitting idle as a Zamindar. This prospect disturbed me." With hope, anxiety, and ecstasy his marriage was solemnised with Subhadra Devi. And of his marriage Mahtab has this to say, "Our lives are intertwined. I shall try to keep you happy. Yet, perhaps, with me your life would not be as much simple."

Despite getting married, Mahtab passed the matriculation examination with a first division. His father and wife were of the opinion that he should be confined to his Zamindari work. But his firm resolve to work for the motherland could not confine him to Zamindari and also to his family.

My only interest was to be something more than an

> ordinary family man, to work for people and to serve my country. But my feeling was that, unless I receive college education, I cannot do anything for my motherland.

So Mahtab met his father at a muffosil granary and informed him of his decision to go to Cuttack for higher studies. Despite his father's hesitation, he resolved to pursue his college education and devote his life to the noble work of serving his motherland instead of managing his Zamindari. And this bold decision helped him emerge as a front-ranking freedom fighter in Orissa and India and remained etched in the hearts of millions of people as the founder of modern Orissa. It was his dream since childhood to fight for the creation of a global family. This was evident from his journey to Cuttack to pursue his college education.

This is how he describes social conditions prevailing at that time:

> At the end of the night when the new sunlight penetrated the darkness in the horizon, what an ecstatic pain nature's womb experiences. The anxiety and ecstasy of frustration become intense at that moment. And again this subsides by the hope of the arrival of a new dawn. At this moment the new sun rises from the old. The year 1920 was perhaps this critical juncture in the life of the Indian nation which was also a historic year for Orissa.

The condition of that time is evident from the words of Mahtab when he was a student of Ravenshaw College, Cuttack. The impact of the First World War on the economy and that, on foreign rule was felt everywhere. The cry of 'resistance' was in the air. There was no way of knowing what was happening in Orissa. The Paika rebellion had occurred in 1816. Since then the British rulers had been trying

cleverly and effectively to break the economic and social backbone of Orissa.

In Mahṭab's own words, "By introducing permanent settlement and modern education system, the Britishers had helped to create a very strong middle-class in Bengal. On the other hand, by introducing a five-year or three-year settlement, abolishing the tax-free Jagir system, implementing its Sunset Act , auctioning the Zamindaris of Orissa in Calcutta and destroying the salt industry the Britishers were successful in completely shattering the backbone of the middle class in Orissa. The Oriya-speaking areas, being situated at the far end of different provinces, failed to draw proper attention of the administration. Orissa had lost its power of resistance by becoming the victim of constant exploitation."

By this time, Gandhiji had emerged to give a new leadership and direction to the Indians. His principle of simple living, his saint-like character, love for Indian languages and his care for the rural folk made him find a special place in the hearts of the common people.

Gandhi had used *satyagraha* (love of truth) as a weapon, in his fight against racial discrimination in South Africa. Now, after his return to India, he used the same in Champaran, Bihar, Kheḍa and Ahmedabad in Gujarat. And this was adopted as the chief weapon in the Indian freedom struggle. In April 1919 Gandhiji launched strike throughout the country against the Rowlatt Act. It was a tremendous success. On 13 April that year the news of Jallianwala Bagh massacre in Punjab shocked Indians and intensified the freedom struggle and inspired the students and the youth to join the freedom movement in millions. Gandhiji became the torch bearer of the freedom struggle. Mahtab was attracted towards Gandhi's personality and his principles.

The storm was already brewing in his heart. He was only waiting for the right time. At this time Mahtab came in

contact with Laxminarayan Sahu, the member of Bharat Sevak Samiti, who established a Seva Samiti in Cuttack. Mahtab joined its cooperative section which helped him learn office work, report writing and the method of collection of facts and data etc. from Laxminarayan Babu. It was he who introduced Mahtab to various aspects of public life.

In 1918, a session of the Utkal Union Conference was held in Cuttack. Mahtab was a volunteer in the conference. Madhusudan Das, the leader of the conference, was not a supporter of the independence movement and his chief concern was integrating all the Oriya-speaking tracts.

The role played by Pandit Gopabandhu Das and the Satyabadi Bana Vidyalaya he had founded was well-known by the time. Gopabandhu was the editor of the newspaper *The Samaj* and the actual news stories describing the effects of governments apathy were appearing in it. The picture of famine in Puri pained Pandit Gopabandhu. Mahtab was convinced with Pandit Gopabandhu who had popularised the ideal of social service in Orissa. But he had not met him yet. Mahtab held Gopabandhu and the Satyabadi School in high esteem. He writes, "It is difficult to ascertain exactly how many educated people passed from this institution, but it was beyond doubt that this institution and its dedicated workers created a new life and ideology in Orissa." Although Mahtab wanted to join politics, the congress as an institution had not struck roots in Orissa. With an aim to educate the young political leaders in Orissa, a library called Bharati Mandira was established in Bakharabad, Cuttack, towards the end of 1919. Nityananda Kanungo, Nabakrushna Chowdhury and Bhagirathi Mohapatra contributed their effort to bring this noble cause into reality. Mahtab wholeheartedly joined them in this cause. At that time Mahtab was selected by the members of Bharati Mandira to attend the special session of Congress in Calcutta. In this convention, Mahtab had the chance to listen to the speeches

of Chittaranjan Das, Motilal Nehru, Lala Lajpat Rai, Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya. Mahatma Gandhi urged people in characteristically simple words "to free their country from foreign rule, and to adopt non-violent method of agitation. Once people adopted non-cooperation, the British rule would automatically cease to be powerful. This is the path the Congress should opt for". Mahtab was spellbound by this speech. Immediately after his return from Calcutta he discussed his experience with the members of Bharati Mandira. Although Mahtab was interested in leaving his studies and joining the freedom struggle, he was undecided.

A session of the Congress was held in Nagpur in 1921. He, along with Bhagirathi Mohapatra went to attend this session and as there was no provincial Committee of Congress in Orissa, the Orissa delegates had to join Bihar Congress. During this session, he was for the first time introduced to Pandit Gopabandhu. About this incident Mahtab writes, "His heart was so soft and sympathetic that I was taken aback. He listened to me very attentively. He could realise that I was mentally very tense. I asked him whether I should appear for my B.A. examination or not." He thought for a while and said, "Sit for your examination and then join politics."

The Utkal Provincial Congress Committee was formed in Cuttack. Gopabandhu was the undisputed leader of Orissa. So he was elected the President of this unit and Mahtab joined it as a member of the Executive Committee.

Mahtab was deeply attracted towards public life right from his childhood. Yet there was a constant struggle within him regarding this. The reason was his father; that his adopted-mother and his wife were completely against this. He did not want to deceive them and this filled his heart with deep sorrow. Later he wrote about this,

For this act of mine, even to-day a deep sense of regret and remorse flows through my heart like an invisible stream. It seems this would oppress me till the end of my life. May be, it would have taken a long time had I tried to convince everybody. But this would have removed a dark cloud of regret from my life. By cheating them I could start my work on time. But the people I betrayed and the injustice I did to them, left a deep scar on my heart. I have to carry this burden constantly to proceed through life. For this I need an extra measure of strength.

After completion of his primary education in the village school, Mahtab enrolled himself in Bhadrak High School. At the primary school, the English teacher Krupasindhu Mohanty and headmaster, Bhagaban Charan Mohapatra inspired him to become a great person and different from others in life.

This gave birth to a new consciousness in his mind. While at the village school, he wrote a prose narrative of the *Ramayana*.

Although he was good at studies at Bhadrak High School, his primary interest lay in public service. So during this time he arranged public meetings for social activist Ananta Mishra, blocked the road during the Commissioner's visit and tried to disrupt the meeting arranged in honour of Bhadrak Sub-divisional Officer when the title of Ray Bahadur was conferred on him. All these incidents bear testimony of his commitment and patriotism.

Mahtab always considered 'marriage as a social shock'. Yet he married Subhadra Devi while he was a high school student and despite this he secured a first division in the examination. Now he planned to pursue college studies. His father and foster mother were against this idea and his wife was constantly persuading him not to study further as it

was of no use. But Mahtab was adamant. He wanted to be different from the common folk. This led him to go to Cuttack and take admission in Ravenshaw College, despite others' objections.

At college he enrolled himself a student of intermediate science. There he came in contact with Nabakrushna Chowdhury and Prahallad Sahoo. In the mess, discussion on various topics was held daily. Then he started an Oriya weekly *The Malay* and an English weekly *The Dustbin*. It was not possible for him to devote his time to his studies. So after completing I.Sc (Intermediate), he switched over to B.A. During this time he wrote regularly on police atrocities and government apathy in Cuttack city in both English and Oriya in *The Utkal Dipika*. To build a library at Bakharabad was his mission. And here he got enough opportunity to discuss political issues and attend Congress sessions. After attending the Nagpur Congress Session, Mahtab was eager to attend the Gandhi-led movement. So he was confused, whether to appear for his B.A. examination or not. At this time a public meeting in Cuttack was organised to welcome Madhusudan Das for his inclusion in the Bihar Orissa Ministry. Mahtab and his friends decided to criticise this in the meeting. Accordingly, a pamphlet was distributed describing Madhubabu as a 'government servant' at the age of eighty. The meeting was to be held in Cuttack Town Hall but it was shifted to Town Hall field for want of space.

When the meeting started, there arose a controversy as to who would preside over the meeting and ultimately it rose to such an extent that the organisers left the meeting in protest. But the proposal that Mahtab moved against Madhubabu finally put a full stop on his student career, because the principal Lambaert had sent a letter to his father describing this incident in detail. Mahtab returned home. He was not at all sorry for not sitting in his B.A. examination and was not ready to stay confined at home. So, under a

false pretext, he came back to Cuttack and took part in Mahatma Gandhi's Orissa visit.

Gandhi was a natural leader and he had established direct contact with every province of this country. His call for non-cooperation movement had spread from every town to even remote villages of the country. At Berhampur railway station he said to the Congress workers, "Don't think of many things; think only of one thing and do it." This sounded like a *mantra* to Mahtab. He founded the path he was searching all this time.

After Gandhiji's Orissa visit, Mahtab engaged himself in enrolling members for Congress and in Swaraj Srama Sangathan's work in Cuttack. He was given charge of Congress work in Balasore District. Bipin Bihari Das became the President of the Congress Committee and Mahtab became its Secretary.

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THE HERO OF THE FREEDOM MOVEMENT

After taking over as the Secretary of the Balasore District Congress, it was Mahtab's duty to organise picketing in front of liquor shops, stop selling of foreign clothes, motivate people to become members of the Congress Party, collect money for Tilak-Swaraj Fund and collect alms to find volunteers at the Swaraj Mandir. While picketing, Mahtab realised that he has developed the power of tolerance. Coping with the sorts of situations he developed his efficiency by carrying out different kinds of programmes. The cordial relations among Congress workers also improved to a greater extent. The real and powerful source of this warmth was Pandit Gopabandhu and his magnanimity.

The annual Session of the Congress in Ahmedabad was held in December 1921. As many as 127 delegates from Orissa took part in that session, of which 53 were from Balasore alone. In this session, Congress decided to launch the Civil Disobedience Movement and Mahatma Gandhi was chosen its leader. Several houses were burnt throughout the country.

In Orissa, these incidents started in Cuttack and became a daily affair. While police blamed Congress for it, common people, on the other hand, thought it to be the work of the police. Mahtab returned to Balasore from Cuttack's Swaraj Ashram. Balasore was no exception. He wrote to the District Magistrate, Shyamlal Gupta and Police Superintendent

Hudson and sought their help and organised a public meeting near the Municipality office field. A proposal was adopted to form a Town Safety Committee to check this calamity. The District Magistrate, the Police Superintendent and Mahtab were nominated its President, Vice-President and General Secretary respectively. The calamity could be avoided by arrangement of night patrolling. It was not revealed till the end who did this and why, nor was any inquiry committee formed to investigate into these incidents. However it can be said for certain that the Congress came closer to people and the administration became more trustworthy after this incident.

Kanika Peasant Struggle

The Chhamuka and Panchamuka coastal areas of Cuttack and Balasore district respectively were known as Kanika Gadjat. The King of Kanika played a prominent role in Utkal Sammilani. In 1922, the King made land settlement and decided to increase land revenue. Although Kanika was a part of the British administrative system, the King managed the famine of 1920 in his own style, which created a new consciousness and a feeling of rebellion in the tenants of Kanika. They objected to the land settlement carried out by the King and wanted it to be carried out by the Government. Hence, the tenants deposited their revenue at the Kendrapada government treasury. The King shrewdly convinced the Governor-General that the defiance of the tenants was manifestation of the non-cooperation movement.

The Commissioner visited Chhamuka area to conduct an inquiry and hundreds of civilians came to lodge their complaints. The King spread the rumour that the tenants were coming to attack the Commissioner. Without further investigation, the police fired on the mob and two tenants were killed. The police firing and oppression angered the

already disgruntled public in Chhamuka area. But Panchamuka area stayed out of this. Mahtab assured the police Superintendent Hudson that the Congress workers would not enter Kanika area.

Instead of opposing the taxation system established by the King of Kanika, Mahtab prepared a leaflet and circulated it among the public. In this, he explained how the King of Kanika was trying to suppress the non-cooperation movement. He wrote:

> The Kanika administration thinks that the wave of non-cooperation movement can be stopped by raising their hands. But it should be remembered that the consciousness of non-cooperation struggle would not only bring down the King of Kanika but also the Delhi government. Now we must make sure that the flames that burn in our heart should be kept burning. It would some day spread like wildfire and would be pathfinder for many other States.

The Sub-Divisional Officer of Bhadrak, imposed section 144 of IPC (Indian Penal Code) against organising any public meeting to discuss the Kanika uprising. Congress President Gopabandhu Das and Bhagirathi Mohapatra held a meeting in Bhadrak and at this meeting a resolution was adopted against the Kanika administration's anti-people policy and tyranny. It was proposed by Mahtab. But it was complained that he had cooperated with the police and had not joined the Balasore Congress Committee in this movement. The State Congress Committee met in Balasore and discussed the matter. A voting was done. It was a tie. So the Congress President Gopabandhu Das had to cast his vote. Although Gopabandhu Das supported the action of Harekrushna Mahtab, some Congress leaders did not support Mahtab's position. On the charges of violating Section 144 of IPC, both Gopabandhu Das and Bhagirathi Mohapatra were brought

to Balasore from Cuttack. They were imprisoned for six months. False charges that they were instigating the people of Kanika and beating the police during the house-burning incidents were brought against them.

After the Chauri Chaura incident Gandhiji suddenly discontinued the non-cooperation movement. Mahtab and many others were not in favour of this decision of Gandhiji. But when Mahtab took part in the All India Congress Committee meeting and listened to Gandhiji defending his decision, he was convinced that Gandhiji was right. Gandhiji was arrested and imprisoned for six years which did hurt Mahtab very much. Mahtab and Niranjan Patnaik then went to Lucknow and apprised Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya about the Kanika peasant agitation.

Pandit Malaviya assured them that he would come to Orissa and, defying the imposition of 144 would visit Kanika. Mahtab came back to Cuttack and arranged everything for Pandit Malaviya's visit. While returning to Balasore, he was arrested under Section 108 of the IPC and was sentenced to one year imprisonment on charges of conspiracy against the Government. When he was produced before the Magistrate, he was charged with delivering a speech against Government which he had actually given before 1921. While writing in "The Swaraj Samachar" Mahtab did not try to defend himself. But, subsequently, he gave a written statement denying the charges framed against him. He wrote,

> I can firmly say that whatever I have said or done is punishable under Section 124 of the IPC. I got the opportunity to spread the message of Gandhiji in Balasore District and Gandhi himself has been imprisoned for the same offence. Whatever, I strongly believe in, I advocate. I also request people to evaluate and accept this. I don't compel people to accept my opinion. It is my strong belief that the present day

Government is totally illegal and aggressive and they don't have the right to remain in power for a moment. No one should oppose this opinion. This is my firm belief that the Government would fall soon. A minority Government would rule over one-third of the total world population and enslave them. Any one with self-respect should oppose it, even at the cost of his or her life.

Truly speaking, if not from a political point of view, at least from the humanist point of view one should join the non-cooperation movement. One should not think that life only consists of eating, sleeping and earning money. As an ordinary worker of the Congress, I have very faithfully tried to perform my duties and I knew that my actions are punishable under Section 124 of the IPC. This is also be mentioned that those who directly or indirectly support the principle of suppression and oppression are also culprit before God Almighty and their own conscience.

I have called upon Civil and Defence officials that they should boycott this Government, and bring the machinery of this Government which is very oppressive to a standstill, because under this Government everyone's dignity and humanity is harmed. Since 6 April 1921, I have been spreading this message and distributing leaflets in all the areas of the Balasore District.

I must mention it here that I don't believe in violence. Nor did I let other resort to it. Hence, this is not proper to call all non-cooperation activities in Balasore as violent. I invite my opponents to come forward and justify at which point this movement turned violent and also prove where I spread the message of violence. I strongly oppose this. I also did not spread any sectarian feelings. When I say

'Government' I mean Indians, too. Those who have formed the government, I blame them.

If I behave decently I would be granted bail. I am not one with this law. I am ready to spend a long time in prison. But I shall not give any written undertaking.

Prison Life

The history of the freedom struggle is the story of freedom fighters and their imprisonment. Mahtab was taken from Balasore to Cuttack jail wearing shorts and sleeveless shirt and in handcuffs. At first he was given the coir to prepare ropes from. He has written about his jail life which started at Cuttack in the following words:

> Two shorts which covered half of my thighs, two sleeveless shirts, and a small piece of cloth to be used as a towel. A cup and one-inch thick triangular wooden piece in which the number of the prisoner, the date etc. had been imprinted with hot iron. This was tied with a thin iron wire and put around the neck in such a way that it could not be easily removed. Apart from this, two plates were given, the bigger one to eat rice and the smaller one to drink water. The latter had to be used in the latrine. Some old prisoners washed these iron plates in brick dust in such a way that they glittered. I used to spend at least one hour a day to wash my utensils. All the prisoners had to finish their morning ablution at a particular time. But the door of the toilet neither had any door nor it had any door-screen. The daily diet of inmates consisted of rice, *dal*, lentils and tamarind. Rice was so full of small stones that it was difficult to eat.

Mahtab did not stay in the Cuttack jail for long. After only a month he was transferred to Bhagalpur Central jail. There too he had to do hard physical labour everyday. There

was no newspaper to read. Only a few books like the *Bhagavad Gita, Purana* or other religious texts were provided. Mahtab had three books at that time with him *Gita*, a *Bible* and Rabindranath's *Shanti Niketan*. While in Bhagalpur, he wrote a novel *'Ajab Duniya'* (Strange world). He also wrote an English book titled *'Free thinking'*. *Ajab Duniya* was never published, as during 1930 the police raided Swaraj Mandir and burnt the manuscript.

After completion of his term, Mahtab was released from the Bhagalpur jail and he returned to Balasore after visiting Gopabandhu in Hajaribagh jail. While in Cuttack, he had started a weekly titled *'Prajatantra'* to spread the message of the Gandhian struggle. The main aim of this paper was to make people aware of Gandhiji's principles and constructive work. Mahtab established a printing press in Balasore. Towards the end of 1923, election was held for the District Board and the Municipality. As Congress decided to take part in it Mahtab fought the election and became its chairman.

In addition to managing the District Board, Mahtab continued doing the Congress work in Balasore district and the Swaraj Mandir became its nerve centre. As per the decision of the Congress he was nominated to contest for membership of the Bihar-Orissa Governor Council and got elected. He continued in the Council for about a year. In 1927 a severe flood occurred in Balasore. He had to deal with the flood, the opium problem and the Kanika peasant struggle.

During this time Gandhiji visited Orissa for four days and the responsibility of making arrangement for his stay fell upon Mahtab's shoulder. The meeting and discussion with Gandhiji inspired him a lot. Afterwards, Gandhiji's ideals and philosophy acted like a beacon throughout Mahtab's life, which he has mentioned in many of his writings. He says,

I informed Gandhiji of all the activities going on in Orissa. He listened everything and replied, "Only justice prevails. Our cunning can give us success to a certain extent. But, in Orissa, you will find neither justice nor cunningness. So, where can you find any name and fame here? Here both work and skill are absent."

On another occasion, I asked him, "Mahatmaji, this advocacy of non-violence is doing harm in Orissa. Here people do not react even when being abused. In this situation it is needless to preach people tolerance. Will it not help others to develop anger?"

Mahatmaji explained, "I understand workers ought to act according to their situation. Non-violence is the best path. The workers have to react to the situation in such a non-violent manner that they can attract others towards this path of truth. My intention is different from the way you advocate non-violence. I should therefore describe my weapon as progressive non-violence."

About his Khadi movement I once told him, "Mahatmaji, you work so hard to spread the message of *Khadi* in Orissa. But the history and settlement report clearly show that apart from agriculture, salt cultivation was the mainstay of the people of Orissa. Orissa became poor ever since this salt cultivation was stopped. So, instead of *Khadi*, should not salt cultivation be re-started?" Giving his characteristic smile Mahatmaji replied, "I shall tell you of the advantages of *Khadi* later on. First you find out 25 people who are ready to sacrifice their lives for re-starting salt cultivation. I shall re-introduce that in Orissa. Can you find them?" I told him, "Many people would come forward." Gandhiji said, "All right. When you find 25 such people, write to me. I shall come to Orissa to launch my movement."

With great difficulty Mahtab could find only two people.

When Simon Commission toured India, everyone opposed it. But in Orissa, for the formation of a separate state, while some leaders welcomed the Commission, others opposed it. Utkal State Congress Committee had passed a resolution to hold a demonstration to oppose the visit. In the early stage of his political career Mahtab created a new consciousness in different fields. Being closely connected to the freedom struggle he succeeded in making the non-cooperation movement of Congress and other constructive programmes people-centric. The King of Kanika on many occasions levelled personal accusations against Mahtab and even attacked him. But Mahtab displayed remarkable patience while tackling this.

To damage his political supremacy in Balasore District, the followers of the King of Kanika tried all kinds of tricks. It was beyond the King's dream to tolerate Congress forming the District Board under Mahtab's leadership. A case was filed against him. It was alleged that Mahtab had submitted false vouchers when he had got elected to the Bihar-Orissa Council. The High Court declared Mahtab's election null and void submitting false election accounts.

It was also clearly mentioned in the verdict that he could not contest in any election for the next five years. Many people firmly believed that the King had bribed the judge. When the verdict was pronounced a criminal case was filed against him.

As the President of the District Board, Mahtab had spent about one lakh rupees in excess of the amount sanctioned in the budget. He was asked to return the amount. The Commissioner brought this complaint because Mahtab had written against him in the *Adventure* journal. The allegation was that a King had raped a minor girl. Instead of initiating action against him, the Commissioner was covering up the

matter. And Patna High Court also gave its verdict against the Commissioner.

When this verdict was pronounced Mahtab was disheartened a bit but very patiently and firmly he responded to adversity. At this juncture, many of his so-called friends deserted him. In this critical hour, Pandit Gopabandhu Das stood beside him. The *Search-light* published from Patna wrote in favour of Mahtab.

The Kanika party was convinced that Mahtab would not be able to come out of this crisis. But this conspiracy failed. Mahtab wrote in his reply, "I am ready to return the money. But only if work done with that money, like digging wells, ponds, and the construction of hospitals would become my property, because the District Board and the government cannot take back both money and the work done with that money."

The final verdict on the criminal case was declared and the judge Nandalal Singh acquitted Mahtab. And the Accountant General also accepted the logic put forth by Mahtab and cancelled the surcharge recovery order served on him.

When he was about to throw a feast after getting out of this trouble, a telegram brought a sad news. Pandit Gopabandhu had died of heart attack in Satyabadi. The news was a big shock for Mahtab. He lost interest in everything.

Non-Cooperation Movement

The Congress session was held in Lahore in December 1929 and the resolution for Complete Independence was passed in 1930. Mahtab was elected as the President of Utkal Pradesh Congress Committee. Gandhiji announced that he would start his Salt Satyagraha at Dandi. Perhaps it was Mahtab who had given this idea to him before the start of the non-cooperation movement, because most of the national leaders in Orissa were worried about this problem. In this

regard, Pandit Gopabandhu had put forth his view in the Bihar-Orissa assembly in 1918. Many violent incidents had taken place in the coastal districts like Cuttack, Puri and Balasore in Orissa.

A Pradesh Congress Committee meeting was held in Balasore. Mahtab presided over it. It was decided here to start Salt Satyagraha at Inchudi in Balasore under Gopabandhu Chowdhury's leadership. Inchudi is only 12 kilometres away from Balasore. If Gopabandhu Chowdhury was arrested, Acharya Harihar Das was to take over the leadership. Mahtab chalked out the plans and arranged people who would take part in it. Nabakrushna Chowdhury, Pranakrushna Padihari would decide on the path to be taken by the *satyagrahis* and mobilise volunteers.

As a precautionary measure, the British government imposed Section 144 at different places prohibiting public meetings. A public meeting was held on the Kathajuri riverbank on 23 March to convince the public in this regard. Gopabandhu Chowdhury and Purna Chandra Bose addressed the gathering.

On 30 April 1930, Gandhiji started his historic Dandi march. On this day, in Orissa, Gopabandhu Chowdhury and Acharya Harihar Das also started their march along with 21 volunteers from Swaraj Ashram. It was planned that they would cover 120 miles in seven days and reach Inchudi on the 13th where they would break the Salt law. Just one day before this incident the police arrested two of Mahtab's close associates, Surendranath Das and Jivaramji Kalyanji and they were sentenced to six months imprisonment. Yet this did not dampen the enthusiasm for the Salt Satyagraha.

On 7 April, the police arrested Gopabandhu Chowdhury from Chandola on charges of violating Section 144 and imprisoned him for seven days. Thereafter groups of *satyagrahis* from Puri, Ganjam and Sambalpur started arriving in Balasore.

On the morning of 13 April the *satyagrahis* violated the Salt law at Inchudi under Acharya Harihar's leadership. He was arrested along with six of his associates. In the Permit Building arrangements were made for accommodating the *satyagrahis*. Staying there Mahtab supervised the entire movement. After seven days the police released Gopabandhu Chowdhury and he came to Balasore and attended the Congress Executive body meeting. It was decided in this meeting to intensify the movement. On 19 April, the police again arrested Gopabandhu Chowdhury, Mahtab and Dr Krushna Prasad Mohanty. This Salt Satyagraha was so widespread that, under the leadership of Rama Devi, Malati Devi and Janhabi Devi many women took part in it. The Queen of Kujanga, Bhagyavati Pata Mahadei along with about 500 women volunteers broke the Salt law near Kujanga.

When the news of this movement was published in a newspaper, a fine was imposed on it. In all, nearly 11,700 people were jailed for taking part in this movement.

Both Mahtab and Gopabandhu Chowdhury were imprisoned for one and half years each. Mahtab was clandestinely sending articles for the *Prajatantra* from the Hajaribagh jail. Officials of the British Government got news of it and Mahtab was degraded to B grade prisoner and sent to the Patna jail. When Mahtab reached the Patna jail, fellow-prisoners welcomed him by chanting slogans like *Mahtab Zindabad* (Long live Mahtab). Mahtab opened a gymnasium in the jail and taught the prisoners a few patriotic songs. When the prisoners took charge of the kitchen, they were provided with quality food. Mahtab wrote a play named *Swarajya Sadhana*, which was staged there.

Gandhi-Irwin pact was signed on 13 March 1931 and as a result, all political prisoners were freed. While Biswanath Das, Sashibhusan Rath, Gopabandhu Chowdhury, Niranjan Pattnaik, Jadumani Mangaraj, Nityananda Kanungo and

others were immediately freed, Mahtab was released from jail much later. But after this, he could not work outside for long. After the Congress Session at Karachi, Gandhiji's Round Table conference did not materialise and this provided enough impetus to intensify the movement further throughout India. Congress was banned, volunteer groups were declared illegal, restrictions were imposed on newspapers, and nationalist leaders got arrested.

Mahtab was arrested once again from Balasore and imprisoned for six months as a B class prisoner. While in the Hajaribagh jail he got a chance to come in contact with Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan and his brother. Both the brothers were revolutionaries and it was their strong view that if amicable relationship was established between Hindus and Muslims, the sectarian problems of India could be solved. Mahtab also held the same view. Based on *Harijan* theme he wrote a novel titled *Nutan Dharma* (The New Religion). He was regularly received information on Gandhiji's every political move. He held the view that people should lead their lives according to Gandhiji's revolutionary ideas and he himself tried to apply these in his own life. He also discarded his holy thread in support of Mahatma Gandhi's call for complete abolition of untouchability and Khadi movement.

While still in jail, Mahtab received news of his father's death and this was a terrible blow to him. He was full of remorse for the treatment he had meted to his father. As both Mahtab and his wife, Subhadra Devi, were in jail they could not attend the last rites for the deceased.

In Agarpada, Mahtab established a Karmi Mandir and took up constructive work like spread of *Khadi* and development of *Harijans*. As the period from 1933 to 1937 was a lean one from the point of view of Congress agitation, Mahtab remained in Agarpada and engaged himself fully in all those activities. Subhadra Devi joined him in this work

also. In 1934, Gandhiji visited Orissa and Mahtab closely followed him throughout this tour and gained a lot of confidence.

Gandhiji's Orissa visit and his march on foot from Puri to Bhadrak was a historic event. He everyday covered five miles in the morning and another five miles in the afternoon and created a new kind of consciousness and enthusiasm among the people of Orissa. Mahtab has recorded all these events in his book, *Gandhiji and Orissa* in detail. A brief extract from that book is given below.

> "On the final day, I got the opportunity to offer hospitality to the guests at Bhadrak. I decided that whatever the guests wanted, I shall arrange for them. People like Buto and others who were with Gandhiji were non-vegetarians. For the last few days they were all feeling very uneasy. I arranged for them food of their choice in the Bhadrak dak bungalow. For those who preferred to stay in my house, I arranged good vegetarian food. All were very happy, but Mirabehn complained before Gandhiji that I had arranged non-vegetarian food for many during the course of their journey. Gandhiji asked me about this. I politely told him that as their host I had to see to it that my guests were satisfied. After listening to me he told me to discuss this matter at Kharagpur. There he listened to both the sides and agreed to my decision. I realised that Gandhiji was a great man who was far above narrow feelings.
>
> During his Balasore visit *Bapuji* stayed in the court premises for one day. In the final phase of his journey he took rest at my Bhadrak residence. At Bhadrak, he made me and Subhadra Devi demonstrate our spinning skills. Small incidents from his life showed me how he could solve great problems."

Farmers' Agitation

Immediately after the non-cooperation movement, the *satyagrahis* tried to organise the farmers and the *adivasis* of Orissa. After returning from jail Mahtab adopted the path of constructive work shown by Gandhiji. And he also tried to look at the problems of farmers and the people of the Gadjat areas. Towards the end of 1933, Mahtab thought seriously about how the farmers of Balasore could be freed from their tax burden. A Conference of All India Farmers' Congress was held in Lucknow in April 1936 and as a representative of the State Congress, Mahtab attended this conference along with Nabakrushna Chowdhury, Surendranath Dwivedi, Lingaraj Mishra, Bhagirathi Mohapatra and a few others.

On 29 November 1936, the communist leader Sarat Chandra Pattnaik and Guru Charan Pattnaik organised a farmers' convention in Calcutta. The aim of calling this convention was to organise farmers and strengthen their movement so that farmers' agitations in Orissa could become widespread. Mahtab inaugurated this convention.

In May 1936, another farmers' convention was held in Orissa. As Mahtab was the president of state farmers' Satyagraha, this convention was organised under his leadership. Farmers were advised not to give gifts to the zamindars. Importance was laid on the formation of organisations for the sale of agricultural produce and establishment of banks to provide loans to the farmers. A Sub-Committee was formed to look into these matters, and Mahtab, Nabakrushna Chowdhury, Rajkrushna Bose, Lingaraj Mishra and Malati Choudhury were appointed as members. It was decided that they would hear the complaints of the farmers and report it to the Pradesh Congress Committee.

In February 1937, a farmers' conference was held in Balasore under the presidentship of Harekrushna Mahtab in which he directly called upon the farmers to protest

against and check the atrocities of zamindars. On 20 March 1937, he presided over another conference held in Bhubaneswar. In this gathering he advised people to actively participate in village reorganisation activities. At Jharsuguda, another conference was held on 10 March 1937. In this Conference Mahtab, Biswanath Das, Laxmi Narayan Mishra, Bodharam Dubey, Prahallad Ray Lath, B.M.Joshi and others took part and demanded for a reduction of tenant tax, relaxation of laws on forest produce and abolition of tax collection by zamindars.

In June 1937, around 1500 farmers gathered in a conference in Banpur. Mahtab chaired it. In his presidential address he said, "Congress has been all along with the farmers, the poor and the destitutes and they are the greatest enemies of the British Empire. It is observed now that, instead of the farmers' union joining hands with Congress, it is treading a lonely path. As a result Congress would become weak and this would not help in any way the farmers' agitation."

During that time the Congress Socialist Group was quite actively working in the farmers' agitation. They claimed that they were different from the Farmers' Union Congress but at the same time against the zamindars. Mahtab was trying to create co-operation between the Farmers' Union and the zamindars. Even the landowners of Bhadrak demanded to collect taxes from tenants without fine, because they were facing a lot of problems in collecting land revenue from the farmers. The document was signed by Mahtab himself.

Congress Socialists and Communists exerted influence upon the farmers' agitaton. But the Congress Government (1937-1939), which was working under the British government, was trying to bring an approachment between the landowners and the tenants. Perhaps this was the part of the policy of the Congress government and Mahtab really directed this policy.

Prajamandal Movement (1938-39)

The rulers of Gadjat states of Orissa were encouraged by the British and the latter did interfere in the affairs of these native rulers. Their own administration was malfunctioning and they tortured the people mentally, physically and economically. The rulers led their lives of luxury and treated their Kingdom as if these were their personal property. The British government did not care to implement any administrative or constitutional reforms in the native states as a result of which the common people came to the state of revolt and in many feudatory states of Orissa people started revolting. As this revolt was spearheaded by the *Prajamandal* (Union of People) from various states of India, this was called the 'Prajamandal Movement'. Congress had decided not to interfere in the internal affairs of the Gadjat States. When the government of India Act, 1935 came into force, peasants' displeasure against these native rulers became widespread and as a result, Congress was forced to interfere in the affairs of these states.

It was decided in the Haripura Congress Session of 1935 that Congress leaders could extend their cooperation to the Prajamandal Movement at a personal level. Mahtab involved himself in this agitation for some reasons and the decision of the Congress further encouraged him to get more intimately involved in the movement. As a member of the All India Congress Executive Committee Mahtab recorded details of the incidents happening in the native states like Nilagiri, Dhenkanal, Talcher and Ranapur and discussed them with Gandhi, Nehru, Subhas, Patel and Sitaramayya.

As Mahtab actively took part in the Kanika movement, he had deep knowledge of way the Gadjat states were being ruled. Apart from this, he himself was the ruler of Agarpada. Mahtab took over as the President of the State Inquiry Committee in the Orissa States Peoples' Conference.

During the Civil Disobedience Movement attempts

were made to organise the people of the princely states. An organisation was also formed to this end. In 1931, the Second All India Gadjat Peoples' Convention was organised under the Chairmanship of Pattabhi Sitaramaiha. In this convention a committee was formed to investigate practices like bonded labour, exploitation of tenants and other such illegal practices in the princely states. Satish Chandra Bose, Balwant Rao Mehta, Brajasundar Das, Sarangadhar Das were members of this Committee. Sarangadhar Das was its convenor. Unfortunately, that committee could not achieve much problem.

The Congress Executive Committee meeting was held in Bombay. In this meeting, Pattabhi Sitaramayya requested Mahtab to take the responsibility of this committee. But he was reluctant to accept this offer as he had not much idea in this regard and agreed to accept the responsibility if no suitable alternative was found. Of this, he says in his autobiography *Sadhanara Pathe*:

> The third responsibility which fell upon my shoulder was tougher than the first two. It depends upon the reputation of my political career and this was Gadjat work.
>
> So many times Gadjat Praja Conventions were held in Orissa prior to this. I did not attend any of them. I got some news while working for *The Prajatantra*. Otherwise my knowledge about the Gadjat states was very limited. In the concluding session of Orissa Gadjat Praja Convention, a committee was formed to investigate the complaints of the Gadjat people. Dr Pattabhi Sitaramayya presided over this session. I do not remember the names of the other members. But the committee did not function for quite long time. One member of the committee did not agree to join so his place fell vacant. During this time I had been to Bombay to attend the Congress Executive Committee meeting.

> Dr Pattabhi had also attended the Session. Suddenly Dr Pattabhi asked me over telephone, shall I agree to fill up this vacant position. I did not know anything about the committee. I told him that if nobody is available I have no objection in joining as a member. Accordingly, as President of the Committee he chose me as a member. In this session, I got a chance to meet the Secretary Balwant Rao Mehta of All India Gadjat Praja Sammilani and others. I had discussed with them and got some idea about the functions of this Committee. In due course I took interest in this work and found it to be very useful. Gradually, I got involved completely in this movement.

The committee started functioning under Mahtab's chairmanship while Lal Mohan Pattnaik and Balwant Rao Mehta were its members and Sarangadhar Das was its Secretary. The movement started from Nilagiri. The ruler formulated two laws putting restrictions on the registrations of different unions and organisations of meetings and conventions. But protesting against these restrictions people organised meetings and rallies. As a result, many of them were fined and jailed.

As chairman of the Inquiry Committee, Mahtab issued a press statement in this regard. He wrote,

> The committee condemns various laws of the Nilagiri state. They violate the fundamental rights of its subjects. As a result, the people are being terrorised by the ruler. The committee expects that people would raise their voice against this cruel rule adopting the means of truth and non-violence. Kailash Chandra Mohanty, Banamali Das and Goura Chandra Das were then leading the Nilagiri peoples' agitation.

As per Mahtab's advice, the leaders of the Nilagiri

people's movement, prepared a 31-point Charter of Demands and handed it over to the Nilagiri administration. They also gave an ultimatum that, unless their demands are met, they would launch a peaceful *satyagraha*. On 7 May 1938, the ruler of Nilagiri announced that a seven day notice and permission should be sought before any meeting or gathering is organised in the state. However, a meeting was held on 5 July, the day of the Car Festival without seeking any prior permission and a demand was voiced to relax the agricultural laws and to stop the cess collected by the King. At the instruction of the King, the police and some henchmen of the King lathi-charged the people in which many were injured. 116 persons were arrested and put in a middle school building. The Congress was then ruling Orissa. Hence, no police force was sent to help the King. Mahtab met the District Collector Solomon to discuss with the Prajamandal leaders and find solution. The Political Agent Bezelgette was also impressed by the discipline and patience shown by people. A meeting was held. Kailash Chandra Mohanty represented the people and the Dewan represented the King. Mahtab was present at the meeting. After a prolonged discussion, the King and the prisoners reached an amicable solution. The prisoners were released and the restrictions were lifted.

The King accepted 18 out of 31 demands of the people. Prajamandal leaders were allowed to conduct meetings and march in a peaceful way. Bonded labour and other unlawful taxes were done away with.

The people of Nilagiri were granted the freedom to complain about their problems. For Mahtab this was a novel experience. He informed Gandhiji about this.

Immediately after Nilagiri, an agitation started in Dhenkanal. But Mahtab did not achieve the kind of success he had got in Nilagiri. If he was blamed for this, he did not mind, because as soon as agitation started, he got a wire

message from the King and immediately proceeded there and tried to find an amicable solution. The Dhenkanal Praja Mandal was formed on 27 June 1938. The peasants got united and organised meetings. They demanded more rights and formation of a responsible government. But the state administration tried to suppress them. On 10 September, police entered Bhuban and Neelakanthapur villages and started looting houses. They arrested the president of Prajamandal, Harmohan Pattnaik, Vice-President Mahesh Chandra Subahusingh and the Secretary Laxmidhar Sahu. In the police firing as many as 17 people died and many others were injured. The people of Dhenkanal fled to Cuttack along with their children.

To investigate into these incidents a committee was formed of which Mahtab was a member. Discussion was held in the presence of Major Bezelgette and Mahtab, but this could not continue for long. The Dhenkanal administration brought more force from outside into the state. The committee formed by the King was not impartial. Many members of the previous committee were excluded. Surendranath Dwivedi wrote:

> "In our opinion, when the Dhenkanal movement reached a decisive point at this movement, Mahtab Babu devised a plan to reach an amicable solution. It was quite harmful for the movement. This was done keeping Sarangadhar Babu, Naba Babu and Malati Devi in the dark and without consulting us. In this regard Mahtab Babu's intention was quite strange. Like other Congressmen, he was not against this movement nor did he retrace his stress once he got involved in any movement. But to begin any agitation in a simple manner or to take it far was against his principle. His principle was to reach any solution by hook or crook."

Mahtab's view was that "unless local leaders are very

active and efficient, no agitation can be a success. Peoples' enthusiasm is not enough; it requires proper management and steering."

Mahtab did not get the expected success in finding a solution to the Dhenkanal problem.The Prajamandal movement was in its full swing in Talcher, when Mahtab took part in the Congress Executive Committee meeting held in Delhi. At Gandhiji's instruction, Mahtab took responsibility to manage the Talcher in the right direction.

Talcher Prajamandal was formed on 6 September 1938. Pabitra Mohan Pradhan led the movement. People were quite dissatisfied with the way tax was collected in the state. The Prajamandal leaders, through a ten member committee, demanded basic rights for the people and formation of a responsible government. But the state administration ignoring this demand resorted to beating, arresting and looting people. On 21 and 23 September, police fired upon agitating people and a *harijan* lost his life in Chandragiri village. Many more were injured. Prajamandal was declared illegal. This led to *satyagraha* against the royal brutality. Hundreds of *satyagrahis* voluntarily went to jail. The jail premises resembled Hitler's concentration camps. Prajamandal leaders like Pabitra Mohan Pradhan, Dasarathi Pani and Maguni Pradhan sought Mahtab's help. Gourishankar Pradhan and Kruttibasa Rath met Mahtab in Cuttack and narrated the hair-raising tortures inflicted on prisoners by Police in Talcher.

When the King did not yield to the peoples' demands, at Gandhiji's instruction, thousands of people with their families came to the border town under British administration, Angul, and stayed there in make-shift huts and under the open sky. Mahtab met the ruler of Talcher and stressed the need for an amicable solution. The king issued a declaration to demean Mahtab in the eyes of the agitators. But they (the people) did not accept the King's statement.

The agitation continued. People started leaving Talcher. Mahtab requested Gandhiji to send his representatives there. Accordingly, A.V. Thakkar Bapa, Prof. N.G.Ranga, Rev. C.F.Andrews, Sarojini Naidu and Agatha Harrison visited Angul and saw the plight of the common people there which they narrated to Gandhiji later. Gandhiji published an article on this in *Harijan* and wrote a letter to Lord Linlithgow and requested him to send the Political Agent to inquire about the plight of the people and mitigate it.

In March 1939, Major Hensay and Assistant Political Agent visited the Talcher refugee camp and a two points agreement was signed between Mahtab and Hensay in the presence of Ensurge. But the Talcher administration did not implement this agreement. Mahtab informed Gandhiji, Subhas Chandra Bose and other Congress leaders of this during the Calcutta Congress Session. Gandhiji again reminded Lord Linlithgow about the same. Mahtab met Resident Colonel Bratra. He visited Talcher on 1 March 1939 and discussed the matter with Political Agent, Major Surle, the Cuttack Collector, Captain Greams and eight other Prajamandal leaders. It was expected that the ruler would agree to accept eight out of the nine demands made by the Prajamandal leaders. But the King did just the opposite. All the efforts made by Mahtab were in vain. The new Political Agent Major Surle said that the declaration was made in consultation with Mahtab, which Mahtab denied. At last, Mahtab met Major Stevenson, the Chief of Military Intelligence and sought his help. Although Stevenson told that Surle was wrong, he did not give any letter in this regard. As a result, Mahtab once again sought Gandhiji's intervention. When Viceroy Linlithgow intervened in this affair, military intelligence gave its report. Surle was transferred within 24 hours and the King accepted Mahtab-Bensary agreement. After this, as per Sir John Hubback's assurance people started coming back to their homes.

On the Talcher agitation, Mahtab wrote in his autobiography, "From this incident, I learnt directly from Gandhiji, how to manage a great agitation like this. Unless everything is supervised directly in minute detail and contact is not maintained with all the people concerned constantly, a legitimate agitation might fail; this was made clear to me."

Ranpur Rebellion

The story of Ranpur rebellion is a sad chapter in Orissa. It is a hair-raising incident where the people of Ranpur started their agitation under the leadership of Prajamandal against the injustice and excessive tyranny of the King.The Government declared it to be illegal. This caused the rebellion to be widespread and it went out of control. Hundreds of agitators were put behind bars. The Prajamandal leaders announced that they would gather in front of the palace demanding release of the jailed agitators on 5 March.The King got scared and sought the help of the Political Agent. Bezelgette had camped at Nayagarh near Ranpur. He instantly responded to the King's request and came. But the people blocked his path by trees. With much difficulty he reached Ranpur. By that time thousands of people had gathered near the palace. He had an altercation with the agitated mass. But a rumour spread that Bezelgette had shot dead two people. The people's anger brimmed over. All attempts to pacify them was in vain. When the unruly public gheraoed him and tried to manhandle him, the enraged Sahib gave order to shoot and as a result a man died on the spot. The furious public beat Bezelgette to death.

Fearing that Ranpur Prajamandal agitators might resort to violent means, Banamali Ram requested Mahtab to come to Ranpur. On 5 January, Mahtab went to Ranpur along with Banamali Ram in a car. He first enquired about Bezelgette Sahib in Khurda police station. Without getting any

information regarding his whereabouts and to avoid any further delay he proceeded to Ranpur. Staying at a palace about seven miles from the place Mahtab sought the King's permission to meet him. The man stationed there telephoned the King and got his reply: "The Political Agent is dead. If you can save my life, come immediately."

Mahtab proceeded towards the palace. By the time he reached there it was two O'clock at night. The police stopped him and asked for his identity. After his identification an inspector took him to the place where Bezelgette's body was lying. Mahtab saw two other dead bodies lying there. A police constable was also lying with severe injuries not very far from the place. Mahtab sent the constable to the hospital in his car. Then he advised the Prajamandal leaders to escape. In this incident, an attempt was made to involve Mahtab in the Bezelgette murder case. Even the then Commissioner of Police opined that Mahtab had secretly conspired to get Bezelgette murdered. Orissa police also stated in its report that there was evidence of Mahtab's complicity in the Bezelgette's murder. Noor Khan, the constable whom Mahtab had sent to the hospital also deposed against Mahtab. But Major Stevenson investigated the case and gave a report that it was not true that Mahtab was involved in this murder case. He had accidently reached the spot on the fateful day. When Miss Harrission convinced the Commissioner, Mahtab managed to free himself from this case. The case against the accused came up for trial and two people were hanged and some others were jailed. The two martyrs, who were sentenced to death, were Raghunath Mohanty and Divakar Parida. It was Mahtab's courage and farsight which saved many lives in this incident.

The High Court judge wrote in his judgement, "The incident of that day, which resulted in Bezelgette's killing, he (Mr Bezelgette) too was responsible for the same."

The Ranpur administration was overhauled. The King

abdicated. The political department took over the administration of the state. The Major had paid the price for shooting at an angry mob.

The Viceroy came to Cuttack in August 1939. Giving his opinion on the Gadjat report, Mahtab said, "In the darkness of these small Gadjats of Orissa, this report has thrown a ray of light and we are slowly proceeding towards it."

The Gadjat Enquiry Committee's report on the Gadjat movement was published. In this report vivid descriptions were given regarding the indescribable torture in these states. Although, it cannot be said that the Prajamandal movement was a complete success, yet it ultimately led the merger of Gadjat states in Orissa after independence. Mahtab had given the right direction and leadership to this movement. The participation of Harekrushna Mahtab, Gopabandhu Chowdhury, Biswanath Das, Nabakrushna Choudhury, Malati Devi, and Surendranath Dwivedy and their co-operation and leadership brought this movement to the attention of the whole country.

Individual Satyagraha

Mahtab took part as an invited member in the Congress Executive Committee meeting held in Wardha in 1940. In this meeting the Congress Executive Committee decided to give non-cooperation a concrete shape and the demand of Congress for complete independence was accepted without amendment. After his return from Wardha, Mahtab tried to give shape to the Satyagraha movement through the Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC). PCC formed four departments, such as the welfare of *harijans*, problems of the minorities, the spread of *charkha* and *khadi* and political campaign.

For furthering the constructive work of Congress, Mahtab toured the districts and tried to mobilise people. As president of the Balasore District Congress Committee, he

persuaded people to oppose to the collection of war taxes. In October 1940, Gandhiji asked his followers to launch personal *satyagraha*. The objective of this *satyagraha* was to oppose the war. By joining this *satyagraha*, Mahtab, Biswas Roy, Biswanath Das, Nabakrushna Chowdhury, Nityananda Kanungo and others were imprisoned. While giving a lecture against the war at Remuna, Mahtab got arrested and was sentenced to one year imprisonment. He was put in Berhampur jail as an A class prisoner. There he got enough time to read The Bhagavad Gita and Chaitanya Charitamrita, and discussed the same with his fellow prisoners. While in jail he got the news that a ministry had been formed under the leadership of Maharaja of Paralakhemandi. In this ministry, Pandit Nilakantha Das and Godabarish Mishra had joined. But this was against Congress decision not to form the government. Hence, Nilakantha Das was suspended from the Congress Party.

Mahtab was released from jail on 1 December 1941 and he started campaigning against this coalition ministry. So, he was arrested once again and put behind the bar for 45 days.This arrest of Mahtab was condemned by leaders like Gandhi, Nehru, Rajendra Prasad and others.

Individual *satyagraha* slowed down for some time. Keeping Gandhiji's individual *satyagraha* in mind, Mahtab wrote,

> The dislike that spread throughout the country against the British rule, Gandhi did not like to suppress. He thought that let this feeling take the shape of a movement rather than remain suppressed in everyone's heart, and the result should be left to the Almighty. Instead of spelling out a message for this movement, he left it to the rational thinking of the masses. If he is not arrested, then he would try to steer the movement by non-violent means. But he wouldn't suppress Congress people's feeling of hatred and suspicion

against British mis-rule. This was my impression about his (Gandhiji's) idea of individual satyagraha."

Quit India Movement

The All India Congress Committee session was held on 7August 1942. The top leaders of Congress discussed about the future course of movement. On Gandhiji's advice this "QUIT INDIA" proposal was mooted out. The movement spread to every nook and corner of the country. After this proposal was adopted, Gandhi called upon Indians to participate wholeheartedly in this movement. The call to "do or die" was given.

Gandhiji was arrested on 8 August and was put in Agha Khan Palace in Bombay. Other frontline leaders like Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhai Patel, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Acharya Narendra Dev, J.B.Kripalani, Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan and Mahtab were also arrested and sent to Ahmednagar Fort.

The British government did not realise the intensity of this movement and tried to suppress it. But it raised its head as an irrepressible wild-fire and engulfed the entire country.A shooting incident occurred at Eeram in the Balasore district on 29 September 1942. This was a most terrible incident when 29 *satyagrahis* laid down their lives in police firing. This is considered a mini Jallianwala Bagh in Orissa.

Mahtab spent his jail term in Ahmednagar Fort from August 1942 to April 1945. He spent these three years in a disciplined way and did not waste even a single minute. There he read and wrote regularly, took exercises, worked in the garden etc. This disciplined life helped him to learn and acquire knowledge on many things and write immortal literary pieces.

Mahtab emphasised the cordial relationship among various leaders in the jail. He wrote,

> Once I was playing badminton as Jawaharlal's partner. Acharya Kripalani and Sankar Ra were our opponents. The referee was Pattabhi Sitaramayya. We lost the game. The game was so exciting that Jawaharlal felt bad about the defeat and in a fit of anger he blamed me entirely for the defeat. As a result, I stopped playing badminton. A few days passed. One day Jawaharlal himself dragged me to the badminton court and forced me to play. At times we did behave like children.

Mahtab played flute and this made life in the jail quite enjoyable for one and all.

Nehru wrote in his *Discovery of India*

> The eleven friends, those who were with me in Ahmednagar Fort jail, were not only my political compatriots, they had vast knowledge about both ancient and modern India and they represented many fields of contemporary India.They represented all the living and ancient languages of India which was making the nation bold and in all our discussions these things were reflected quite often.

Although their lifestyle was bound by a regulated discipline, they utilised their time in their studies and research. As a result, while Nehru penned his magnum opus, *Discovery of India*, Mahtab wrote his two volume *History of Orissa*. In his preface to the book Mahtab writes,

> I had no such interest in history since my student days and I had no clear idea about Orissa's history either. But in 1942, when after my arrest, I was put in the Ahmednagar Fort or *Chand Bibi Ka Kila* and spent about three years, I found that the air was full of discussion of history. We all still consider that that was the best phase in our lives. The intellectual pursuit and discussion we had there, was not possible in the political

hue and cry in the world outside. Each one of us tried to delve deep into the past and throw light on the history. It is for the readers to judge, how far we have succeeded in that effort. In course of our varied discussions, it fell to me to make a presentation on Orissa's history unexpectedly. One day, Jawaharlal Nehru rushed into my room and showed me the following lines from the following text: "*The making of Indian Princes* by Edward Thompson". Page-62: "Notorious shrine of Jagannath, the uncouth temple whereon, incomprehensible people reverend ugliness as the personification of divine attributes and Brahminism seemed to flaunt its difference from all the other religions of the modern world.

In an enraged tone Pandit Jawaharlal said, "Mahtab, do you know anything about the origin of Lord Jagannath?" While I had been to Puri, I had seen the wooden idol. I was awe-struck by the glimpse of that unusual figure. What is that image? What are the legends and sayings? Why is Jagannath worshipped in such a way?" I really felt ashamed for not being able to give an answer. After this incident I wrote an article *Story of Jagannath* for my jail mates. For this I took two years time. Everyday, I had to work for almost 12 hours a day. This article was highly appreciated by my friends. During this time Nehru was discussing the history of ancient Buddhism. I also took part in the discussion. I talked to him about the origin of Lord Jagannath and this cult. During that discussion, I realised that no proper history of Orissa had been written so far. Whatever is available is based on anecdotes and not based on historical research or truth.

In 1945, Mahtab was transferred from Ahmednagar Fort jail to Sambalpur jail and in May that year he was released.

Election was held in 1946. Congress won this election. On 23 April 1946, a four-member Congress Ministry took oath under Mahtab's Prime Ministership. The Ministers were Nabakrushna Chowdhury, Lingaraj Mishra, Nityananda Kanungo, and Radha Krishna Biswasray. While this Government was in power, India achieved her long-cherished freedom on 15 August 1947. Mahtab mooted a proposal in the Orissa Legislative Assembly. It is said, "The Assembly express its heart-felt joy at the advent of independence and ushering in the Provincial Autonomy on 15 August 1947 and records its deep gratitude to the great national leaders Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Gopabandhu Das, who was the father of nationalism in Orissa and to all those workers who have perished in the struggle for freedom in the course of last quarter of the century."

Mahtab dreamt during his student life, "something had to be done beyond this common life". Thus came to an end of a great chapter in history. He now became the ruler of the Independent India. Mahtab's commitment, sense of responsibility, mature rationality endowed him with the title of the father of modern Orissa.

3

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

The Formation of a New State: Orissa

From 1946 to 1950 Mahtab was the Prime Minister of Orissa and after independence, he took over as its Chief Minister. The construction of the Hirakud Dam, integration of princely states, and the establishment of the new state capital at Bhubaneswar, were his major contributions. Although these were controversial decisions, he was convinced he had acted for in the larger interest of Orissa and its people.

Construction of the Hirakud Dam

As a result of the great Bengal famine of 1943, the Government of India thought of constructing a multi-purpose dam across the river Damodar. This was extensively published in newspapers. Mahtab was at the time imprisoned in Ahmednagar Jail. He was mulling over the need for building of a similar dam to be constructed across the river Mahanadi as this would protect the coastal area from the ravages of flood. Draught-hit Sambalpur would be irrigated and electricity would be generated. This would be a milestone in the development of Orissa. While in jail he sent a letter to Thakkar Bappa through his younger brother. After his release, he discussed this with the then Governor Hawthorne Lewis and his adviser B.K.Gokhale. In 1946, he took over as the Prime Minister of the state and Chandulal Trivedi assumed the office of the Governor. Meanwhile a massive mass agitation raised its head in

Sambalpur. People feared that if this dam was constructed a large tract of fertile land along with many villages would be submerged. The central government also had doubts about the safety aspects of this dam. But Mahtab's Himalayan patience, intelligence and ability helped him in achieving success. The agitation subsided in due course and on 13 April 1948, the then Prime Minister of India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru laid the foundation of this dam.

It would not be wrong to mention here that the Hirakud Dam project was the first milestone in the history of Orissa's economic development.

Integration of Princely States

Mahtab was conscious that for the unity, integrity and sovereignty of the nation it was essential that the princely states should be integrated with India. During the independence movement, the peasant movements in princely states like Kanika, Ranapur and Nilagiri had convinced him beyond doubt that only through the integration of Gadjats the people of the whole country could get a united government after independence. With the integration of 26 Gadjats in Orissa the path was paved for the merger of 500 other princely states with India. During the Prajamandal movement Mahtab was the Chairman of the Orissa State Peoples' Enquiry Committee. So, as soon as he assumed office as Prime Minister of the State, he initiated discussion with the government of India and Sir Stafford Cripps on the issue of the merger of Gadjat states. Pandit Nehru was of opinion that it was not possible for these princely states to merge with their neighbouring states. But as a result of Mahtab's farsightedness and skill, Vallabhai Patel accepted this proposal and translated it into a reality. Sardar Patel writes,

> "Ten years ago Mahtab prepared a future blue print for Orissa which he made into a reality during his lifetime.

He was the moving spirit of that drama. His enthusiasm and his constant endeavour to overcome all hurdles at last brought him this success. I am happy that helped him in this regard, which were not only his ambition but also the dream and goal of the whole of Oriyas. I am happy once again that this backward state became the pathfinder which ultimately the whole country followed it."

Of the present area of about one lakh fifty six thousand square kilometres of Orissa, the Gadjat States comprised about half. As soon as the country became independent on 15 August 1947, the princely states declared them independent and sovereign and were free to decide whether they would integrate themselves with India or what their terms of relationship with other Indian States would be. To order these affairs a department was created under the able stewardship of Sardar Patel. V.P. Menon was the chairman of this department.

In this regard, Mahtab wrote a letter to Patel describing the administrative and law and order problems that would crop up if these princely states are not merged with the State of Orissa. Just at that moment an agitation took place in Nilagiri. Prajamandal launched a movement at Nilagiri and wanted to take the rule of the state in its own hands. As a result, widespread violence and lawlessness occurred. Its impact was felt in Balasore. Mahtab wrote to the central government asking for urgent military action. On 8 November 1947, the central government gave permission to government of Orissa to interfere in the Nilagiri affairs and also warned that, if the state government failed to resolve the issue, the state government and Mahtab would be held responsible for this.

On 14 November 1947, the Orissa Military Force took over the administration of Nilagiri in its own hands. The

people of Nilagiri welcomed this step. The King also handed over the administration to the state without offering any resistance. After the occupation of Nilagiri, Mahtab discussed with Sardar Patel the issue of the integration of Gadjat States.

On 13 December 1947, Sardar Patel along with Menon arrived at Cuttack and started negotiating with the Rajas and Maharajas. At first, the latter were reluctant to sign this agreement. Sardar Patel reminded them that if they didn't sign the agreement, neither the state nor the central government would be responsible for any law and order problem in future. The Prajamandal leaders too were in favour of integration. The kings were well aware of the Nilagiri incident. So, on 1 January 1948, all Gadjat states except Mayurbhanj signed the merger document with Orissa. Maharaja of Mayurbhanj gave his consent in this regard on 16 October 1948 and it was merged with Orissa on 1 January 1949.

Praising Mahtab's role, historian Durga Das in his book *India from Curzon to Nehru and After*, writes,

> Narrating the story of first merger, Patel told me that the idea had originated with Harekrushna Mahtab, who formed in 1938 the State Prajamandal, an organisation of the people living in the states of Orissa. The Orissa Congress leader proposed that the small states be merged with the provinces under British administration and state peoples' conference appointed a committee with Mahtab as its Chairman to study the proposal in relation to Orissa. The Committee recommended that the states be brought under the provincial government as reforms in them, while they maintained their separateness would have no value. Mahtab took up this matter with Cripps when he came to India in 1942. The political department agreed that this was the only feasible solution of the problem, but did nothing about

> it. When India became independent, the British departed leaving the states as they were. Mahtab convinced Gandhi and Patel of the soundness of his schemes and he suggested to Patel in November 1947 that he should set the process in motion in Orissa.

Surendranath Dwivedi writes in his autobiography,

> After becoming the Prime Minister of Orissa (The Chief Ministers were called Prime Minister then) Harekrushna Mahtab started expediting the Gadjat merger at the government level and he influenced the Cabinet Mission and political departments and put forward strong logic in favour of the merger.

Although 26 Princely States were merged with Orissa, Saraikala and Kharsuan went to Bihar. This was a strong blow to the leadership of Mahtab.

Saraikala and Kharsuan

On 1 January 1948, government of Orissa took over the charge of 25 Gadjat states. Saraikala and Kharsuan were included in those states. The Saraikala from the very beginning protested against merger with Orissa. Expressing their objections, the Raja of Saraikala and some vested interest groups wrote to Central government at the instigation of Bihar government. At that time Mayurbhanj had not yet been merged with Orissa. As a result, it was difficult to reach Saraikala by the land route.

To decide the fate of Saraikala and Kharsuan, Government of India appointed the then Judge of the Bombay High Court, Bandekar in February 1948. But, before Bandekar could come to inquire and submit his report, the central government decided to integrate these two states with Bihar. In May 1948, the notification was published in this regard. Reaction was expressed in Orissa against this

decision and day by day it started spreading. Saraikala and Kharsuan could not be merged with Orissa due to intense pressure from the Bihar-Delhi lobby and some also held Mahtab responsible for this. Despite this, integrating the princely powers with his able leadership Mahtab became the builder of modern Orissa.

Establishment of New Capital in Bhubaneswar

Before becoming Prime Minister, Mahtab had chosen Bhubaneswar as the site for the new capital of Orissa. There was more than one reason for this, while the people of southern Orissa wanted Rangailunda to be the state capital, the people of northern Orissa wished it to remain at Cuttack. Bhubaneswar is a place of great historical importance. Its history encompassed Asoka's invasion of Orissa and British rule. So Mahtab put this proposal before the Assembly on 30 June 1946. After a lot of arguments the proposal was ultimately approved on 30 September. The central government gave assurance that it would bear the full expenses for the construction of this new capital. On 13 April 1948, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru laid the foundation of the new capital. A look at present day Bhubaneswar would make one to appreciate the foresight of Mahtab.

Of the establishment of capital city Dr Mahtab has this to say in his autobiography:

> "The proposal for the establishment of the new capital at Bhubaneswar was approved by the Orissa Legislative Assembly on 30 September 1946. The decision on the matter was far from unanimous. Right from the formation of the separate province of Orissa in 1936, there was controversy over the choice of the site for a new capital. Some thought that Cuttack city extended towards Choudwar could serve as the capital. Others were of the opinion that Rangailunda near Berhampur was an ideal place. Of course, there was a strong opinion

in favour of continuance of the capital at Cuttack. During the war (Second World War), when the place for an aerodrome was chosen, American soldiers found a vast stretch of land in a jungle in Bhubaneswar. They built the aerodrome by clearing the jungle. Thereafter, the idea of establishing the capital at Bhubaneswar came to mind. It was discussed with Sir Hawthorne Lewis and Gokhale. Before the formation of the ministry in 1946, it was decided that the capital will be set up at Bhubaneswar. Because Bhubaneswar is the only place in the whole of India where one can find living traces of a continuous history of long two thousand five hundred years. This was what drawn me towards Bhubaneswar. At the time of the formation of the separate state of Orissa, the then India government decided to sanction thirty lakh rupees for the establishment of capital. But this task could not be undertaken unless two crore rupees was in hand. In this regard I met Liaqat Ali. He informed me that the inflation will increase if the new capital is built. I argued with him that houses at Bhubaneswar would be made of stone and the wooden beams would be available from the nearby jungle. So, coal prices etc. would not be hiked while purchasing such materials. He understood my point. Then funds were sanctioned for the construction of the new capital. Bhubaneswar is the only new capital in India which has received a grant from the government of India for its construction. Chandigarh and other capital cities have received funds in the form of loans.

Although Bhubaneswar was chosen as the site for the new capital, work on this could not be expedited during Mahtab's first ministry. After him, the Nabakrushna Choudhury-led ministry did not pay much attention to it.

So, when Mahtab took over as the Chief Minister for the second time in 1957, he included improvement of the state capital in the Second Five Year Plan and thus the construction of State Assembly and Raj Bhawan was started and both building of the New Secretariat was expedited. The museum, three Akademies: Sahitya, Sangeet Natak and Lalit Kala Akademi, and 'Kala Mandap' which has been renamed 'Bhanja Mandap' were constructed. Mahtab strove to make Orissa a developed state in the whole country. Apart from separating High Court and Public Service Commission, he started *The Prajatantra*, Prajatantra Prachar Samiti and organised *Visuva Milana* for propagation and spread of art, literature and culture. These were his unique contributions. On one hand he initiated the developmental process through his administrative capability and on the other he worked for the social upliftment by his great non-political acumen. Both give evidence of his wisdom and foresight.

Serving the Nation as a Cabinet Minister

Relinquishing the Chief Ministership Mahtab joined in the Central Cabinet on 13 May 1950. Nabakrushna Choudhury became the Chief Minister of Orissa. Pandit Nehru was convinced that, owing to his personal relationship with different leaders, his ability to identify the problems and his exchange of ideas and correspondence with administration to bring those problems towards a definite solution and his performance as the Chief Minister of Orissa, Mahtab would successfully handle his responsibilities as a Cabinet Minister at the centre. After taking over the Ministry of Industries and Supply, he wanted to formulate policies for the management of these departments. They are called "Rules of Business". Despite his efforts, when these policies could not be formulated he wrote, "The reason for not adopting of this rule of business is – we all lay more stress on politics, not on administration. But, in reality, politics and

administration are deeply inter-related with each other." He was of the opinion that, as there was no definite policy for the smooth management of administration, the service-delivering officers did not show their commitment and loyalty towards it.

Uniqueness of Mahtab was to deeply enquire into every problem. As Minister of the Industries he found that multi-sectoral capitalists were interested in getting more and more profits and they did not want any competition or control either. He too thought that, if the agricultural economy of the country has to be converted into an industrial economy, agro-industries have to be established near the agricultural fields. The farmers can process their agricultural produce in those industries and get more benefit and an interest would be created in their mind for industries.

The Central Government took a decision to adopt a mixed-economy. As a result, a conducive environment could not be created for setting up industries in the minds of the general public. As Cabinet Minister he had displayed much foresight and fostered innovations. He never hesitated to bring to the notice of Prime Minister Nehru any important issue and freely expressed his opinions on the abolition of privy purse, foreign policies and utilisation of foreign currency, the Hindu Code Bill, structural changes in the administration, the need to omit Gandhi's 'Gram Swaraj' from the Panchayati Raj system, and the faulty system of enquiry of the CBI etc. For this independence, Pandit Nehru did not include him in the cabinet while restructuring his ministry. Chittaranjan Das observes that, "He had to be appointed as Governor of the then Bombay Province in the snake and ladder game of position and power."

Mahtab was appointed the General Secretary of the Congress Parliamentary Party and entrusted with the responsibility of maintenance of coordination in the Ministries. Realising that there is a lack of coordination

between the ruling mechanism and the party, he freely expressed his views which led to further differences of opinion between Mahtab and Nehru. Mahtab then resigned from this post. Nehru wrote to him: "Apart from ordinary political coordination we were tied together in a deeper personal bond." Replying to him Mahtab had given a hint of a change in the value systems. He wrote, "Situations bring about changes in many value systems. Perhaps that is also required for friendship and comradeship if it occurs through unnatural bitterness again and again."

In the Indian democratic system, as the party fails to play an active role in administrative system, the relationship between the ruler and the ruled is collapsing. If the party can help in a minister's work, the administrative work would be smoother, this was his opinion.

The Governor of Bombay

Mahtab was the first man from Orissa to become the Governor of a State. The Chief Justice of Bombay High Court M.C. Chagla administered him the oath of secrecy as Governor of Bombay on 2 March 1955. Whenever Mahtab was appointed to a post, or whatever responsibility he assumed, he wanted to do something new whatever the situation was. After taking over responsibility of Governorship, as an honest Congressman, he was successful in establishing cordial relationship between the Chief Minister and the Congress President, the Chief Minister and the Chief Justice, the State Government and the University administration. Apart from this, to maintain law and bringing about changes in different fields, Mahtab toured the state and gave the government useful suggestions.

As Chancellor of different universities he attended and delivered addresses which displayed his extraordinary intellect, knowledge and erudition. While delivering the convocation address at Pune at a womens' university, he

said, "The need of the hour is to remove the inequalities that exists in our social system. This is not only to be wiped out from the man-woman relationships but it should be removed from the society that is ridden with caste and colour based discrimination. Indian independence is an extraordinary event in the whole world. This has not only brought political freedom, but also social equality."

At Dharward, in Karnataka University, Mahtab had said in his Presidential address, "Indian independence had brought the whole country under one administrative mechanism and system, which was hitherto absent and then democracy was established in its true sense here. We have also adopted democratic socialism. He called upon the younger generation to become aware of these revolutionary changes. If the younger generation responded to the changes taken place in the world then success was theirs—this was his heart-felt opinion.

While serving as the Governor of Bombay, he proved himself as a successful administrator, and earned everybody's love as a true patriot and nationalist leader, who had shown his undisputed loyalty to his nation and as a great educationist and philosopher.

4

A TRUE FOLLOWER OF GANDHI

Right from the participation in the independence movement in his student days, Mahtab associated himself intimately to Gandhiji and was inspired by his ideas. Perhaps nobody in the whole of India understood Gandhi the way Mahtab did. He was not a blind follower or worshipper of Gandhi, Gandhian ideology or his philosophy. His was a sober assessment of the man and his thought. He had undiluted faith in the application of Indian political, economic, social and cultural situation. In 1964, Mahtab in his lecture on "Gandhi— Political Leader" at Annamalai University perceptively elucidated and evaluated Gandhi and his philosophy. Mahtab said,

> Gandhiji was not like the Buddha, Christ and Mohammed, Ramakrishna or other incarnations that had come to this earth to establish godliness in human beings and have left behind their own religions and religious *gurus* and prophets. In his political strategy he had tried to bring unity and cooperation among the Hindus and Muslims because in India these two religious communities have clashed again and again.
>
> Gandhiji was neither a philosopher nor did he propagate any philosophy. He has only claimed to be a believer in the Philosophy of *The Gita*; he was not a holy man either. Gandhiji himself had said, "People say I am a holy man mingled and lost in politics. But the fact is that I am a political man, working hard to be a holy

man." He was also not a social reformer like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Keshav Chandra Sen, Swami Dayanand, or others. But it is true that he could change the course of history as a great political leader.

As he could bring the philosophy of the *Bhagavad Gita* from an intellectual height to the common man, he brought politics from the level of the educated people to the common illiterate folk. These illiterate people after many centuries not only became dedicated soldiers of the freedom movement but also became soldiers of a non-violent movement. No leader upon this earth could do this." Explaining the Gandhian philosophy, Mahtab said, "Today's India has no ideology of its own. Democratic socialism is not a philosophy. This is only a politico-economic programme. Secularism is not a philosophy either. This is a national policy. National integration is impossible without a national philosophy. Gandhiji has given this ideology to us. Gandhiji's Swadeshi economy, *Satyagraha* (Love for truth), *Ahimsa* (Non-violence) which could lead the social system towards equality and development, is the need of the hour."

In the creative writings of Mahtab, we feel the influence of Gandhian philosophy at many places. In an article "Revolution and Gandhiji" he wrote:

> The uniqueness Gandhiji created in the thought process is no more to be seen to-day. In this situation, there is a call for socialism. According to Gandhiji, socialism or liberation of the exploited class could not be achieved by adopting western methods. In the West the exploited classes have to exist. Because this is established on capitalism; socialism cannot be established on the foundation of capitalism. So, a revolution is required in the thought process. In Gandhiji's opinion, for this

> revolution you have to go to the people and have to work sincerely with them. Unless we look away from the west, our eyes would never sight the common people.

The social and political life of Mahtab was deeply influenced by Gandhian philosophy and ideology. And his literary life was also no exception. Expressing his displeasure over the lack of Gandhi age on Oriya literature Mahtab wrote,

> Gandhian age has not influenced the Oriya literature much. If someone analyses the Oriya literature after fifty years, he would be surprised how such a great social and political revolution could not touch its literature. This is an irrecoverable weakness in the development of Oriya literature. Today, still there is time and we can bring the influence of Gandhian age of the recent past into our literature.

Mahtab was worried about Gandhism not being properly implemented. This is reflected from his collection titled *Gaon Majlis* (Village Committee). He wrote: "It is seen that in the last fifty years the appeal Gandhiji had made to the conscience of the affluent has not been heeded. Even in a thousand is not interested in utilising his earnings for the service of the community or willing to lead the life of a commoner. On the other hand, the state has to fight against the influence of wealth. In this situation, there is no way out except calling upon the masses to rise against exploitation. If this movement is organised peacefully Gandhism would be useful, otherwise it won't. No theory can be evaluated by words only. Gandhiji himself used to say this. We have to substantiate this theory through our deeds."

Mahtab expressed his appreciation for Gandhian ideology by saying that this idealism should be adopted as

a national philosophy and to implement this. He had written it again and again and as a statesman he had successfully performed his role. Perhaps, for this, it may be rightly said that politics was not his profession; it was the call of his soul.



Dr Harekrushna Mahtab



His wife Subhadra Devi



Mahtab released from jail after serving his term as a freedom fighter



Mahtab with Gandhiji at Delang (Odisha) during Sarva Seva Sangha session in 1939



Taking oath as the Chief Minister of Odisha



Mahtab with Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru when the latter came to inaugurate Hirakud dam in 1956



Two stalwarts of Movement for merger of Princely States— Sardar Vallabhai Patel and Mahtab



Mahtab with Kaviguru Rabindranath Tagore



Mahtab amidst litterateurs during *Visuva Milana* function



Mahtab, the creator of *Meena Bazar,* with children



On behalf of Central Sahitya Akademi, the then Chief Minister of Odisha, Janaki Ballav Pattanaik conferring Dr Mahtab with Sahitya Akademi award for his book *Gaon Majlis* on 30 April 1984, at Bhubaneswar.

5

AN ASTUTE POLITICIAN AND ARCHITECT OF MODERN ORISSA

Beginning his political life as a common worker, Mahtab became a prominent fighter in the freedom movement, the Prime Minister after the formation of the separate state of Orissa, Chief Minister, Minister at the Centre, and Governor of the then Bombay Province. Although he was a powerful public figure, he had to face many crises and ups and downs. Yet, he had refused to accept defeat. He wrote in a letter dated 31.05.1952 to Pathani Patnaik,

> It is difficult to decide your duties and more so to perform them. But it is easy to decide to reach a position and easier to reach to assume that position. My life moves along a dry and rocky path of duty. So, there is no time to hanker after any position or honour.

Mahtab had to resign from the Governorship of Bombay to take over the reign of the Orissa administration. The chief motive behind bringing Mahtab back to Orissa was to deal the disturbances created during Nabakrushna Choudhury's chief ministership. But some others thought that as Mahtab was interested to become the chief minister, these disturbances were created. When the Central Parliamentary Committee decided to put Mahtab in Nababābu's place, Mahtab wrote a letter to Nababābu. The letter is reproduced below:

Private and personal

Governor,
Bombay Raj Bhavan,
12 July 1956

Dear Choudhury,

After putting much thought and hesitation I am writing this letter with reluctance. Don't know how you will receive this. The fact is, you were thinking of resigning since long and Central Parliamentary Board soon after allowing you to do this has decided to let me take over the chief ministership. Although this decision was taken at Bombay on 4 June, the sorry part of it is that until Mr Dhebar and Morarji Bhai informed me about this, I did not know of the matter. I was thinking along another line; so this decision was quite unexpected to me. I had already communicated my decision to Jawaharlalji, Pantji and Maulanaji. But they have all advised me to accept the Parliamentary Board's decision. I am not happy with this decision, although some friends in Orissa thought that I am interested in going back to Orissa. But the central leadership does not want that. I totally believe in the philosophy of work. Whatever progress I have made at the spiritual level and whatever little I have gained from this, I presume, my duty in Orissa is completed. Whatever I have been doing, people would evaluate my deeds like those of a dead man. So, everyday the letters I receive requesting me to return to Orissa, this is the reply I give. I have written to the correspondents that I want to work for Orissa at the fag end of my life. Till then I would move around like a free bird. I feel that the decision of the Central Parliamentary Board has trapped me in a cage.

When I was thinking along these lines, the proposal of the State Committee and the Working Committee came. Immediately I wrote to Radhanath Babu that he should convince them that you should continue to hold office and save others from this headache. But it seems you are unmoved.

Dhebar advised me to get ready to relinquish my present assignment by August end or the beginning of September. I also told him what was on my mind. But he is unmoved. It seems the matter has been decided.

But I apprehend that, if I return to Orissa, I shall find myself in an awkward situation. I don't fear to face either the work or opposition or any problems. But the question is who works with interest and who performs it out of compulsion. I shall be very happy if I am appreciated by the people of Orissa. Whatever assignment I undertake, I get pleasure in carrying it out successfully.

A great desire of mine would be fulfilled, if within our life time, we could make Orissa a pride place in India. But, as I believed that for this life my work in Orissa is already completed. I suppressed this heart-felt desire. I don't know, what life has stored for me. But, if I fail to do something in this regard, my life would seem a great failure. I was therefore in search of a new horizon. At least, as I grow old, the desire for work would vanish. But, it seems, there is no escape from one's past deeds. One has to face helplessly to one's fate and the outcome of deeds.

To be able to endure this fate I seek your blessings. Differences of opinion would definitely occur in this world while working in different fields, while evaluating different situations as a decision-maker and working according to different methods. Despite this, tolerance binds people together, conflicts lead them away from each other. I have heard from many that in 1948-49 when you resigned, you did so for not agreeing to many of my decisions.

I have not discussed these things with anybody. I also don't know either these are true or false. I have accepted that seldom we find full unanimity in the thinking and style of functioning of different people. In spite of this, people work together with patience and understanding. It is not expected that if somebody takes certain responsibilities,

others would come forward to help him. But whether he gets this help or not, whosoever takes certain responsibilities expect help. If he fails to get any help, first of all he has to accept that the problem lies with the seeker. Following this much acclaimed principle of "duty" I whole-heartedly expect your cooperation.

I don't know what you are thinking. The expectation with which I was pursuing my duties is disturbed once some new wishes enter my mind. Strong mental restraint is required to suppress the long cherished expectation and to engage oneself in a new direction.

I shall be grateful if I receive a reply from you and if required, we shall meet to discuss this matter further.

Yours truly,
SD/-
Harekrushna Mahtab

Sri Nabakrushna Choudhury,
Chief Minister, Orissa

There are many instances of political leaders trying to acquire and possess power. Hence, there is nothing universal about Mahtab wishing once again to be the Chief Minister of Orissa. Thus, the above mentioned letter was only meant to seek the affection, wishes and cooperation of Nabababu. By this Mahtab has proved himself an astute politician. It is necessary to look at how and under which situation Mahtab took over the leadership of the State for the second time.

During the tenure of Nabakrushna Choudhury the boundary agitation became widespread in Orissa. Saraikala and Kharsuan were included in Bihar. There were resentments in Orissa like in many other states owing to the redrawing of the boundaries. Central Government appointed the State Reorganisation Commission in 1953 under the chairmanship of Sayd Fazal Ali. The same year, Orissa Legislative Assembly passed unanimous resolution

for the re-merger of Saraikala and Kharsuan with Orissa and submitted its views to the Central Government and, when the Reorganisation Commission was constituted, it was drawn to their notice.

The State Reorganisation Commission submitted its report in November 1955. As the Commission ignored to the demands of Orissa, there was a general resentment among the people of Orissa, irrespective of party lines. Once again a resolution was passed in November 1955 asking for a reconsideration of the decision of the State Reorganisation Commission and it was sent to the Centre. Before the central government accepted it, Congress constituted a high-powered committee for its scrutiny. To discuss the matter, Chief Minister Choudhury and State Congress President, Biswanath Das went to Delhi. But, Prime Minister declared that the recommendation of the State Reorganisation Commission was final and, Orissa's demand was thus ignored.

Against this injustice shown towards Orissa, the state withstood widespread violence and demonstrations. The situation went out of control. The police had to fire at the violent demonstrators at Puri railway station and near All India Radio, Cuttack. In this firing Benga Pania and Harihara Mohapatra in Puri and Sunil Kumar De in Cuttack lost their lives. Now the situation became uncontrollable and unmanageable.

The displeasure with the report of the State Reorganisation Commission and the widespread confusion created in the State by the boundary agitation raised a big question in the hearts of people of Orissa against the leadership of Nabakrushna Choudhury. Right at that time, in the first week of September 1955, a devastating flood occurred and the breach in the embankment of river Devi at Dalei Ghai caused widespread damage in Cuttack district. Relief work was done through MLAs cutting across party

line. But it was alleged that the government had failed to control the flood and to save people from its impact. This was also a fatal blow to the Choudhury government.

Apart from this, it was the view of many that as Nabakrushna Choudhury was always feeling very helpless and showing indifference it became easier to unseat him. In a situation like this, Mahtab's diplomacy became effective. (Nilamani Routray: *Smruti Anubhuti*, Page 287). How the state administration crumbled during Nabakrushna Choudhury's regime and how he was neglecting state administration being active in the Bhoodan Movement, have been mentioned by Mahtab in his book entitled *While Serving My Nation* (Page 173-183).

Nabakrushna Choudhury resigned in the third week of October 1956 and Mahtab took over as the new Chief Minister of Orissa after relinquishing his charges from the Governorship of Bombay.

Mahtab took the oath on 19 October and got busy with ordering the affairs of the state and making preparation for the forthcoming election. In the election, although Congress came out as the single largest party, due to lack of absolute majority, he had to form a minority government.

To explain, why Congress Party failed to do well in the election, he writes,

> In this election I realised that the Congress has lost its grip upon people after independence. The impact it had with the association of Gandhi's name has been completely lost because of the widespread Bhoodan Movement.

After the election, he took over the leadership of the ministry on 6 April 1957. During that time, an All India Conference of the PEN was held in Orissa. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, Professor Humayun Kabir and other important literary figures attended this conference. As this

was a highly successful event, everyone praised it highly. As requested by K.M. Munshi, despite political upheavals Mahtab also organised a convention of the World Sanskrit Council.

The All India Congress Committee accepted a proposal in favour of forming a coalition ministry instead of running a minority government. The first coalition ministry took oath in Orissa on 22 May 1959. Ganatantra Parishad joined in this ministry. At that time Congress had not formed any coalition not even with an All India Party like the Left, let alone a regional party like Ganatantra Parishad. This was the first coalition ministry in India, and one with a state-level regional party, as the partner.

During Mahtab's rule from 1957 to 1961, the government launched a few developmental programmes which are quite noteworthy. On 4 June 1957 while presenting his budget speech, Mahtab said,

> The Government has taken up the task of establishment of an Engineering College at Burla, work on a 150 bed TB hospital is going on at Chandpur and an Agricultural College has already been established at Bhubaneswar.
>
> An Iron and Steel factory has been established in Rourkela. Arrangements have been made for establishment of a Nitrogen fertilizer and iron sheet making factory there. A cement factory at Sundargarh has already been set in. Two ferro-manganese factories are under process at Joda and Raygada. For the growth of industry, State Finance Corporation have been set up. An industrial estate and for providing technical help, Small Industry Cooperation Institutes have been opened at Cuttack. Two Engineering Schools have been established at Berhampur and Jharsuguda.

During Dr Mahtab's Chief Ministership, expansion of the Engineering School at Cuttack, establishment of a

multipurpose Industrial Estate at Hirakud, construction of buildings for establishment of an Industrial Estate at Cuttack, the Art College in Khallikote, Government Printing Press in Cuttack, foundation for construction of the building of Cuttack Kala Vikas Kendra, efforts for establishment of Rourkela Steel Plant and Paradeep Port, and establishment of Colleges in Keonjhar, Sundargarh, Balasore, Bolangir, Bhawanipatna, Bargarh, Angul, Dhenkanal, Phulbani and Jeypore were made. In short, he tried for the expansion of higher education and industry in Orissa. Credit for the construction of Barabati Stadium and setting up of All India Radio at Cuttack also goes to him.

On 25 February 1961, the coalition ministry fell and thus came to an abrupt end of dreams of Dr Mahtab.

While leading this coalition ministry Dr Mahtab displayed his unique leadership qualities. Yet, a senseless political situation prevailed during the period. Referring to this, Surendra Mohanty wrote, "Mahtab Babu felt quite helpless within the party. In fact, Mahtab Babu was forced to carry out the decisions of Biren Mitra, because during this period the ministry depended a lot on Biren Mitra. Hence, to retain his chief ministership, he depended on Biren Mitra and Biju Babu in order to take care of horse-trading activities. Since that day, horse-trading entered the world of Orissa politics along with political corruption.

In 1961, Banamali Pattnaik was the Chief of the Pradesh Congress Committee. A signature campaign was launched to call a special session of the PCC and to bring against him a no-confidence motion. The Congress top bosses advised Banamali Babu to move a confidence vote in his favour. When the vote was taken, Banamali Babu got defeated and in the same meeting Biju Patnaik became the PCC President.

Biju Patnaik was quite unhappy with the working of the coalition ministry headed by Dr Mahtab. So he wanted to withdraw Congress support and pull the ministry down.

When the decision was approved officially, Patnaik, as PCC President, informed this to the Congress Legislative Party Leader Mahtab in the Assembly. As the Budget Session of the Assembly was already notified, Mahtab immediately called an urgent meeting of Congress Legislative Party members. The opinion of AICC President, Sanjiva Reddy was also sought. Reddy advised Mahtab not to do it in a hurry. But Biju Patnaik did not like this suggestion. He arranged a few secret meetings. It was quite clear that Congress MLAs would create an uncalled for situation in the Assembly on the inaugural day. Aware of this problem Mahtab handed his resignation to the Governor.

In the opinion of his close colleague Dr Radhanath Rath,

> His (Dr Mahtab's) life story is the complete and composite history of our state and nation in the pre and post-independent era. He spent his life in a fighter's spirit in all political conflicts and rivalries. He had all the qualities that a true politician should possess.

Former Governor of Manipur and one of the ardent disciples of Mahtab, Chintamani Panigrahi has said,

> Moving from struggle to struggle was the journey of his life. As if without struggle he did not feel life was worth living. He always welcomed the new, the value of which his contemporaries did not realise easily. Hence, in his endless work schedules, he always emerged victorious.

After the fall of the coalition ministry, he was elected to the Lok Sabha in 1966 and twice to the State Assembly. Mahtab formed Jana Congress Party in the 1967 election and took its leadership, but he did not join the government. He was a member of the State Legislative Assembly till 1977. In the ups and downs of electoral politics, Mahtab never failed to win an election. He always actively took part in the centre

and state politics, yet he never compromised for the sake of power. When Emergency was declared in 1975, he vehemently opposed it. He wrote many articles to mobilise public opinion against this. The result of this opposition was 19 months' imprisonment. A man who dreamt to build independent India into a prosperous nation, an aged, revered and experienced politician who had translated each one of his dreams into reality, had to spend his life as a common prisoner. Was it destiny or an aspect of politics without morality?

As Mahtab was a clever politician and remained the focal point of Orissa politics, many of his associates at times acted against him. "Tit for tat" was the rule in state politics for quite long time, as a result of which many Chief Ministers had to face inquiry commissions which were instituted to go into corruption charges? Even Mahtab was no exception. In 1968, Swatantra-Jana Congress coalition was in power in the State. Rajendra Narayan Singh Deo was the Chief Minister. That year, in the month of May, he got a letter of complaint from the Home ministry at the Centre. Immediately Mr Singh Deo appointed a retired judge of the Supreme Court, Justice J.R. Mudhalkar, to inquire into the matter. 25 members of the Congress Legislature Party had sent a letter against the ex-Chief Minister and other ministers regarding act of corruption allegedly committed by Dr Mahtab. This inquiry continued for quite a long time and, at last on 9 September 1981, Orissa High Court gave its verdict by overruling the decision of the special judge. Both the judges wrote in their decision, "Dr Mahtab is now well past 80 and he is not in active politics. Furthermore, those two prime witnesses, who would have given their witness from the government's side—the then central minister K.D.Malavya and state industry and mines minister Dinabandhu Sahu—are no more. In this regard, even if the case continues, proper justice cannot be done."

Commenting on this judgement, Surendranath Dwivedi wrote in *The Samaj* on 16 September 1981, "Hon'ble Orissa High Court has written in its judgement that Harekrushna Mahtab is not in active politics. Being in politics, I am almost out of it. It is a matter of great relief that an established leader like Dr Mahtab will no longer be harassed by this problem. But it is a matter of regret that, the corruption charges against him remained uninvestigated."

Another matter of disgrace for Dr Mahtab was his suspension from the Congress Party. He was suspended from the Party on 3 December 1972, on charges of anti-party activities. The charges against him were that, during the Cuttack by-election he met Biju Patnaik and conspired to get Nandini Devi defeated. He did not give a campaign request letter in support of Nandini Devi in response to a request from Pradesh Congress Committee. For this, an explanation was sought from him. Instead of giving an explanation, Dr Mahtab wrote a letter of complaint.

In his letter he argued that it was not a matter of grave misconduct or an anti-party activity to meet Biju Patnaik. He pointed out that many Congress leaders including Mrs Nandini Devi also met him (Biju Patnaik) during that time.

On 25 June 1975, National Emergency was declared on Indira Gandhi's recommendation. Mahtab was arrested and put in Bahanjanagar jail.

Mahtab had to face many humiliating situations right from the day he joined the freedom struggle to the day on which he retired from the active politics. Despite this, he never forgot his firm resolve to serve his motherland. This bears testimony to the greatness of his character.

Dr Mahtab's prison life had enriched his life as a journalist. As literature was intermingled with his political thinking, politics in his literary life is also seen to be a different entity altogether. Dr Mahtab once said that he stepped out of active politics and came back to literary life,

which is known as his second love. But he embodied the hope and faith of common people of Orissa. Whenever the political, social or economic condition of the nation was in a critical juncture he firmly took sides in a definite side. There was no middle path for him. And that was the side of the common people, the side of the oppressed and the working class. Dr Mahtab acted as a pathfinder, as a friend, brother, or great grandfather. He was in touch with the soul of the Oriya people.

6

FOUNDER OF THE PRAJATANTRA AND PRAJATANTRA PRACHAR SAMITI

The great Oriya poet Laxmikanta wrote:
"You were born in the lap of a cremation ground,
But you breathed life into a lifeless body,
Brought it the nectar of immortality in the renaissance,
The Prajatantra became the voice of Utkal.

The Prajatantra was born out of the sacrificial fire of the freedom struggle. It is necessary to know, how and under what circumstances, The *Prajatantra* came into being and the situations it had to pass through. In Mahtab's own words,

> "When I joined the non-cooperation movement, I did not think of anything other than the movement. When this movement came to a halt in 1922, bringing out a newspaper was not something I was planning. Late Gopabandhu Choudhury and Niranjan Patnaik entrusted me with the responsibility of the campaign and advised me to bring out a newspaper. In 1923, *The Prajatantra* was first published as a four page weekly, from Mukur Press, Cuttack. Birakishore Das was its printer. I was the editor. After this, it came to be published from Balasore Town Press.
>
> When Laxminarayan Sahu visited Balasore he advised me that *The Prajatantra* should be published from its own press.The idea behind this was to get some profit so that the paper can run smoothly. He wrote a

handnote for a hand press and other necessary things, whose total expenses came to Sixteen hundred rupees.

Mahtab got the parcel released by getting a hand loan of two thousand forty rupees from a village moneylender. Biswanath Hota became the new printer. Karunakar Panigrahi, Kamalakanta Mohapatra and Ramesh Chandra Mohanty became its editors afterwards and were imprisoned.

Although small the effect of this paper it was quite powerful. It was a great critic of the Sonepur state administration. This small weekly became the mouthpiece of the Nilagiri rebellion. Cases were filed against the newspaper but it was acquitted of all the charges framed against it. As a daily newspaper *The Prajatantra* created an environment conducive to the Salt Movement in 1930. Government banned this newspaper in 1932 and in the following year the office and the press were shut down by the authorities. To suppress the publication income tax was also imposed on it. Hence it was no longer possible to run the paper. During this time *The Prajatantra* was the only flatbed press in Orissa. Of course, it was to be operated manually.

As the *Prajatantra* was born out of the sacrificial fire of freedom; it trumpeted the message of patriotism. It created a sense of fear in the hearts of numerous kings, zamindars and the British government. It rose above consideration of self, family, party or sectarian interests and reflected true public opinion.

Through *The Prajatantra* Dr Mahtab was known as a great journalist. Reminiscing about his life as a journalist, he says,

> During that time, along with my colleague Nandababu I visited the office of *The Statesman* and *The Ananda Bazar Patrika* in Calcutta and held discussions with their

editors and learnt from them. I remember their advice till date. The then English editor of *The Statesman* advised me, "Always write your editorials keeping in view the clever readers who know and understand things. Then only your editorials would excel. People don't understand anything and if you want to teach them through your editorials, they would be unnecessarily lengthy and unacceptable". *The Ananda Bazar Patrika* editor advised, "Your pen should have enough strength. Whatever subject you take up, you should take it up boldly and you have to use your pen in such a way that your readers would be impressed." He advised us to put emotion in to our writings. Based on these two pieces of advice we trained ourselves as journalists. We formed the habit of closely observing the reactions over articles created in the reader's minds from that day onwards.

In 1937, Mahtab was the Orissa's representative of the Associated Press.

About choosing a name for his newspaper and his emotional attachment with it, Mahtab says,

I have given the name *The Prajatantra* to this newspaper, which ceased to be published in 1932 only to maintain a link with the past. Nabakrushna Choudhury and Nityananda Kanungo had entrusted me with the publication of the new *Prajatantra*. When this newspaper came to be published I was in the government. Yet I was obliged to spare some time for journalism and work for it. Ever since I have been associated with *The Prajatantra*, I was responsible for every profit or loss of it. This newspaper had created a lot of friends and foes for me. But, without fear I have managed *The Prajatantra* for the all-round cultural development of Orissa and educating the public

> opinion. Whatever anybody may say today, when the dust finally settles down, the opinion that would emerge from calm minds, would be accepted as the only valid opinion. Neither I, nor many of my colleagues shall be there to know what that opinion is. But that would determine the future path *The Prajatantra* would tread. That opinion would find a place for the *Prajatantra* in the annals of history. The institution (*The Prajatantra*) was born out of struggle and serves in the midest of struggle.

Likewise, Mahtab's life was also full of struggle. After a lapse of 15 long years, once again, *The Prajatantra* appeared as a daily newspaper on 8 August 1947. The Prajatantra Prachar Samiti was meant for leading literary and cultural movement along a path of its all-round development. Mahtab was its founder. Over the years *The Prajatantra* Prachar Samiti has grown into a large *banyan* tree.

The foundation of The Prajatantra Prachar Samiti was in reality laid in Cuttack Swaraj Ashram in 1923. The enthusiasm for non-cooperation had already subsided. During that time, a few of us realised that a strong nation must have a solid cultural foundation. For the swiftness of action, swiftness of thought is a prime requisite. As a token of this realisation, the *Prajatantra* was published as a weekly at first. Subsequently, it was shifted from Cuttack to Balasore. We were also planning to bring out a monthly literary journal. But the political situation of the day, our uncertain mentality and inexperience did not allow us to carry this plan. When India became independent, it became inevitable to give as much solid foundation to the cultural organisations as was required for achieving political goals. And, in this regard, an attempt was made to give reality to this long-cherished dream in 1947.

Describing its policies Mahtab says,

"No work of The Prajatantra Prachar Samiti would have anything to do with party politics. Whatever one's political ideology or belief might be it would not affect the activities of the organisation? Party politics demands urgency of action. Cultural organisation which requires more time, contributes to the progress of a nation. The second principle is that this organisation would be based on the attitude of sacrifice. It is known to everybody that Prajatantra Prachar Samiti is a legally registered body. Its managers never get any benefit from the organisation nor does anybody expect any benefit whatsoever. Likewise, its patrons don't want to run it as a profitable business. All the primary workers of this organisation are working in a spirit of sacrifice. They would have earned more, given their capability and education, elsewhere. Yet they work here for pittance. An organisation's success depends on the sacrifice and sincerity of those dedicated people.

Thirdly, principles embody a vision for the future. This means we would always try to encourage the young. Based on three basic principles and without worrying about profit or loss, we are trying to breathe life into as many sections as possible. Now we have opened some sections like *Meena Bazar* for small children, *Naree Jagat* for women, *Jnana Bigyana* for scientific discussion, *Gaon Majlis* for rural people, and *Rabibar Prajatantra* for literature. The pinnacle of this cultural organisation is *The Jhankara*. As the pinnacle depends upon its foundation, likewise the temple's very existence also depends on its crown.

Nilamani Routray, however, had given a different view regarding Mahtab's opinion about the principles, ideals and objectives of *The Prajatantra* and Prajatantra Prachar Samiti. He wrote in "Smruti O Anubhuti" *(Memories and Experiences).*

"A few words regarding *The Prajatantra* and its mode of management (Prajatantra Prachar Samiti) and the objectives and ideals for which this was formed. Prajatantra Prachar Samiti managed *The Prajatantra* and it was the citadel of hope, faith and aspirations of the educated youth of that time. This was set up as an ordinary institution and it was hoped that Prajatantra Prachar Samiti would fulfil the aspirations of the masses. Furthermore, when Mahtab was the Chairman of the Samiti, everybody believed his words that it would work for a public cause and benefit and would be managed as a trust in the sense in which Gandhiji used the firm. Mahtab used to quote Gandhiji's words quite often and it was hoped that the trust would be public property rather than personal property. At the outset, the association and cooperation of people like Nabakrushna Choudhury and Nityananda Kanungo had created this impression."

Appointment and removal in Prajatantra Prachar Samiti Trust Board became a family affair. Who becomes a member of the board totally depends upon Mahtab's sweetwill. The Prajatantra Prachar Samiti now turned into a family institution.

Such an indirect criticism levelled by Nilamani Routray did not create any problems for the functioning of 'The Prajatantra Prachar Samiti' nor its progress. Rather, this institution created by Mahtab has enriched lives of the people of Orissa till date through literature and culture and it has become the source of inspiration for the youth of Orissa.

In *Swadhina Orissara Eka Adhyaya* (A chapter of Independent Orissa): Janaki Ballav Pattnaik writes:

This institution, in reality not only a newspaper organisation, nor was it conceived to be one. This was

for many young men and women who wanted to raise public life in Orissa to a higher level. Although administration was run in the Secretariat, many crucial decisions was discussed and decided here. Mahtab babu was its leader and controller. Despite his busy schedule, he did not cease to come to *The Prajatantra* office daily and discuss everything.

Through *The Prajatantra* and Prajatantra Prachar Samiti Mahtab had tried to give a new direction to the public life in Orissa and bring about an all-round development of art, literature and culture in the state. As Swami Vivekananda established Ramakrishna *Math* and Mission and formulated its mission, vision and principles, which has continued for more than a century as a vibrant institution of self-less sacrifice and service, *The Prajatantra* and Prajatantra Prachar Samiti is the living embodiment of Dr Mahtab's foresightedness, dedication and devotion.

The Prajatantra was a champion of stability. It raised voice against narrow mindedness and conservatism which threatened stability in Orissa. Mahtab's intellect influenced the youth who were playing a leading role in every sphere of development in the state. *The Prajatantra* did not confine itself presenting the news; rather, it took a dominant role in enriching language, literature and culture in it. It has created many a Chief Ministers and Governors. Former Chief Minister, Janaki Ballav Pattnaik remembers his association with *The Prajatantra*, "For me *The Prajatantra* is not a mere newspaper or an institution. It is a part of my life. It provided ammunition during the battle to form a new Orissa. Initiatives such as integrating the Gadjats, constructing the Hirakud dam, to build a modern, prosperous Orissa were in fact taken here.*The Prajatantra* was an important means of raising public opinion in its favour. In the field of journalism also, it had opened many new horizons.

In the field of Oriya journalism *The Prajatantra* became the centre of new experiments. Mahtab followed the first two basic pieces of advice learned at the beginning of his journalistic career seriously. His bold thinking was reflected in his writings. In his *Gaon Majlis* column he painted real picture of the daily lives of common man and criticised the apathetic careless and attitude of the ruling class. His writings expressed a deep concern for the poor, the downtrodden and the illiterate, which had been instilled in him by great man like Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi in his childhood. His *Gaon Majlis* columns were published in the form of a book and earned him the Sahitya Akademi award.

Mahtab was able to infuse a progressive spirit in the minds of the reading public through *The Prajatantra*. He always wanted that *The Prajatantra* through presenting news impartially should be the torch-bearer of society, fight against injustice and be the voice of the downtrodden. The premises of *The Prajatantra* were Mahtab's daily court. Everyday, common people used to throng the place and interact with him. This created new history in the field of journalism after independence. Being an established politician, he took care that his speeches and photographs should not be given prominence in *The Prajatantra*. In his opinion, true journalism should rise above self-interest.

Mahtab used the editorial column of *The Prajatantra* to make people conscious of the development issues in the state. When a movement was led against the construction of Hirakud dam, he described in his editorial title *Hirakud Dam* the benefits the dam would bring to people. "When the ports of Orissa became defunct, Orissa's development received a setback. From that day, the fate of Orissa was sealed. We have to imitate development process. If the Hirakud dam were constructed today, first-class ports would have been a reality at Dhamara and Chandabali. Through

this dam cargo ships can ply up to Madhya Pradesh. If two more dams on the Mahanadi are built big ships can sail through this river. Readers can see that, not only in India, Orissa would occupy a prominent place in the world map. Another advantage of this dam is flood control. For construction of this dam, 1,35,000 acres of land would be acquired, out of which 72,000 acres are cultivable land. Around 150 villages would be displaced. It is quite natural that those, who are affected to their ancestral property and cultivable land, would oppose the construction of this dam. The people of Orissa should see for it that these displaced people are rehabilitated properly. They have to be compensated adequately for the loss of their land, houses, places of worship, schools etc. It is a matter of great satisfaction that in the Hirakud report six crore rupees have been allocated for compensation. Whatever the compensation is, it is natural that the attachment to and love for one's native place would not vanish easily. No one can remove this feeling. But national interest and public benefit should be placed above these. Hence affected villagers should prepare themselves to face these inconveniences. This is the appeal made to them by the people of Orissa."

To carry forward the development process, Mahtab taetfully utilised *The Prajatantra* as propaganda. He had keen interest in diverse fields like language, literature, culture, tradition, art, science, commerce, industry, education, health, food, vocation and society and economics and his understanding was so profound that gave depth and flavour to his *Gaon Majlis* column. Its style of presentation and analysis were unique. Although, the opinions he express were his own, they embodied Mahtab's understanding, experience, wisdom and his commitment.

In the first phase of its existence, *The Prajatantra* sought to revitalise a subjugated national, it became a vigilant guard of public consciousness after independence. Mahtab's

editorial and his *Gaon Majlis* columns played a key role in establishing a very intimate relationship with the people of Orissa, till the last breath of his life.

The Prajatantra was Dr Mahtab's brain-child. Every aspect of *The Prajatantra* reflected his dreams and ideals. He was able to form public opinion through *The Prajatantra*. In his *Gaon Majlis* columns he always laid stress on dignity, self-reliance and love for the motherland. Once a student asked Mahtab that why he has given the title *Gaon Majlis* to his column. Mahtab wrote in reply, "Be it politics, or in economic or any other sphere of affairs, people should take part in all these. To this end, I have been writing this column for the last 23 years. While writing these I feel as if I am discussing something, sitting among village people. Keeping this in mind, different topics are discussed in this column. Although they are not educated in colleges or universities, village people have the capacity to understand everything and form their own views. To assist them to do so is the sole motive of *Gaon Majlis*.

The unique and innovative way of news presentation in *The Prajatantra* reflected of Mahtab's lively thought processes. The *Bate Ghate* cartoons in *The Prajatantra* were of a quality which one would expect of a national or international newspaper.*The Prajatantra* came out in February 1948, as a weekly. A photo and theatre column was added to this. In 1956, it was renamed *Chhaya and Rangamancha* column. As a daily newspaper, *The Prajatantra* played a leading role in giving priority to the Oriya film Industry. To strengthen the stage play section, and to get educated and the enlightened people interested in it, Mahtab wrote a one-act play titled *Bastabika*. This was staged in 1950 during the *Visuva Milana*. A review of this play was published in *Chhaya and Rangamancha* section of the newspaper; *Bastabika* dramatises a tussle between idealism and reality. Although Mahtab was the Chief Minister, he

acted in the play as an administrator. In the theatre history of Orissa, for the first time a Chief Minister, lecturers, and students acted in the same play. Raj Kishore Ray, Smt. Debabala Ray, Harekrushna Mahtab, Keshab Chandra Samal, Mahaputra Nilamani Sahoo, Nrushima Mohapatra acted respectively in the roles of Adarsha, Bastabika, the Chief Administrator and peoples' representative, common man, and zamindar respectively.

A Chief Minister acting in a stage play was a rare incident. This shows Mahtab's commitment to democratic values and his deep love for art and culture. For this he formed Prajatantra Prachar Samiti Natya Sansad and remained its chief patron.

To nurture the artistic talent among the general public, and to help it gain acceptability, Mahtab arranged an art exhibition during the 1951 *Visuva Milana*. This tradition continues till date as an integral feature of *Visuva Milana* function every year. Through *The Prajatantra* he tried to popularise the artistic talent of both young and established artists and honour them with Prajatantra Kala Puraskar. It was not confined to art exhibition or giving away art awards only. Rather, he gave space to news relating to art and culture in *The Prajatantra* as well as in *The Jhankar*. He regularly expressed his views in *The Jhankar* about the need for exchange of artists, conservation of the Konark temple, discovery and preservation of ancient monuments, the need for archaeological research, the artistic heritage of Greece and art exhibition held at different places etc.

7

THE JHANKAR AND THE VISUVA MILANA

On the Mahavishuva Sankaranti day in 1949, on behalf of The Prajatantra Prachar Samiti a literary journal titled, *The Jhankar* was published. This created a literary revolution in the subsequent years in Orissa. The horizon of Oriya literature was enhanced. About this literary journal Mahtab's opinion was quite clear. He wrote,

> Enriching literature is our mission. *The Jhankar* is meant only for pure literary discussion. As the national highway of Oriya literature is left unused, people are resorting to other uneven paths. It is our duty to clear this path and make it worthy of modern day vehicles. We might be the target of jealousy for this. But we declare it again and again that we have not come forward to determine any particular speed not to oppose anybody. Our sole effort is to open-up this literary path. On that road, everyone is free to ply his or her own vehicle or be a pedestrian.

Mahtab also clearly indicated what type of literary writings would find place in *The Jhankar* and who its contributors would be. In this regard he wrote, "We are helpless if any one is reluctant to walk arm in arm with the novice. Literature does not wait for anybody; it would proceed on its own, no matter who joins it or not."

It is not the only motive of *The Jhankar* to provide opportunity to write only but to encourage reading habit is

its other prime intention. Mahtab's writings as its editor was totally different from the editorials he had writen in *The Prajatantra*. *The Jhankar* editorials have been compiled in three volumes as Sahityara Marga Unmochan (Opening the Path of Literature). He had created a new tradition for *The Jhankar*. The reason for this tradition was that, an institution lives long on account of the tradition which sustains it. The Institution which is based on tradition is a long-lived one. The sacrifice and labour that is endured to achieve the goal indicates the devotion it insures. The more the devotion to an institution, the longer is its life-span.

The famous writer of contemporary Oriya literature Manoj Das writes in memory of Mahtab: "The founder of Prajatantra Prachar Samiti, Dr Harekrushna Mahtab was the best brain of his time. The hero of Indian independence movement and the brave builder of modern Orissa was famous in many respects, yet he was different from others. This contribution is beyond comparison not only in establishing a political democracy, but also in consolidating a literary democracy as well. He was truly a symbol of the progressive mind."

The discussion between Manoj Das and Mahtab regarding the publication of articles in *The Jhankar* is quite noteworthy. When Manoj Das visited the premises of *The Prajatantra* and met Mahtab, the latter asked him, "Why are you writing so few articles in *The Jhankar*?" I (Manoj Das) replied, "*The Jhankar* provides a platform to many writers, hence no writer should write a lot in it. " Softening his voice Mahtab said, "Is anybody complaining that you are snatching out his page? You will write in the pages meant for you. It is necessary for all magazines and journals to have a permanent set of writers."

Mahtab was a very wise and experienced editor. Raj Kishore Roy writes, "A story of mine was published in *The Jhankar* based on the life of the then Chief Minister Janaki

Ballav Pattnaik. I had expressed my spontaneous feeling on his devotion for Lord Jagannath in that story. I had not eulogised him nor had I praised him unnecessarily. But Mr Kunja Ray wrote a letter to Mahtab in which he asked him to restrain me from uttering such flattery on the pages of *The Jhankar*. He also wrote to me directly expressing his displeasure."

Mahtab wrote in his editorial, "The writer of the short story is an established and respectable litterateur. He has expressed his opinion and we have published it. He might differ from others. But his expertise and long service to Oriya literature should not be ignored."

The Sunday supplement of *The Prajatantra* and *The Jhankar* had shaped the career of many creative writers. In the words of Mohapatra Nilamani Sahu, who once worked with *The Jhankar*, "With a lot of humility, I admit that *The Prajatantra* and *The Jhankar* gave birth to me, gave birth to my literary self? It has reared me and made me what I am today. Writers far superior to me too were creators of these two institutions. And, on the other hand, this must be admitted that we all as a whole gave birth to and built *The Prajatantra* and *The Jhankar*. These institutions are dear to us all like our own kith and kin. There is a deep sense of gratitude in our heart for the founder of the great institution."

Mahtab's greatness lay in the close attention he paid to the writings submitted for publication in *The Jhankar* and *The Prajatantra*. Of this Durga Madhab Mishra wrote:

> Not only did he himself read each piece he also remembered the name of every character. Once, along with a few others, I had been to Prajatantra office to meet him. (We used to talk to him every afternoon.) He gravely asked me, "Oh Durgamadhav, What did Sankhali serve you today in your lunch? Only arum paste and watery *dal*?"I took two minutes to recollect that he was referring to my cook in the mess, Sankhali

whom I had mentioned in my yet to be published short story. I had written what my cook serves me in my mess. I politely lowered my head. He laughed out loudly and asked, "Bring in those tiffin packets. I felt that Sankhali boy had served me arum paste today."Towards writers, this was how Mahtab expressed his natural and heartfelt affection. From a great mind this sort of affection and love springs naturally.

It is worth remembering the contribution made by *The Utkal Darpan, The Utkal Sahitya, The Mukura* and *The Jhankar. The Jhankar* opened a new horizon for creative possibilities. In the dim literary firmament *The Jhankar* created a new vibration. When Oriya literature had found itself in a desperate condition, Mahtab started the Sunday literary supplement in *The Prajatantra*. In this regard Mahtab started *Rabibar Prajatantra* and *The Jhankar* was an act of inspiration. It was hoped that it would give birth to a new generation of writers. It was my strong belief that Oriya literature would succeed along its normal course once the obstacles in its path are overcome. I proceeded with a strong faith in the intrinsic strength of Oriya literature.

The modern literary piece which found place in *The Jhankar* was '*Jhankar*'. Its writer was none other than Mahtab himself. The lines were as follows:

Piercing the deep slumber
That sound (Jhankar) entered
Both the ears.

Suddenly the silence broke
Everyone became conscious
Of the throb of life.

This is the source of this sound
The music of which
Flows through ages.

It would continue for ages
And suddenly stop
At the infinity.

That is the music of life,
Full of love
And ecstasy,

Following this music
We all become active.

The Jhankar is the murmuring music of global consciousness, the voice of the earth, the stepping stone of modern Oriya literature. And the chief architect of this temple was Mahtab.

The Visuva Milana (The *Visuva* Gathering)

The *Visuva Milana* is a literary movement. The Visuva Sankranti is considered the first day of the Oriya New Year which falls in the Oriya month of Vaisakh. Mahtab chose this auspicious day for holding a literary meet where writers would exchange their opinions. During these days readers, writers, publishers, intellectuals, researchers and students assemble. In other words, this is an annual day of *The Jhankar. Visuva Milana* has enriched Oriya culture and to a great extent, it has, in due course, turned into a national literary festival. In the pages of *The Jhankar,* Mahtab wrote, "It is my wish to create a new age in every field in Orissa and to raise a new consciousness Orissa should be at par with every other developed state of India. We should all feel proud of our

state. Many educated and enthusiastic youths joined us and contributed a lot to the growth and development of this great institution. So intimate was their involvement that the Prajatantra Prachar Samiti in due course turned into a great institution. Centering on Prajatantra, many other big and small institutions sprang up, among which *The Jhankar* was notables, and *Visuva Milana* was its natural outcome.

On the occasion of the *Visuva Milana*, in 1987, Dr Mahtab said, "The aim of this gathering is to foster personal interaction and exchange of ideas among writers. For two magazines *(Sunday Prajatantra* and *The Jhankar)* their affectionate blessings are always sought. Celebration is a part of this function. We hope this meeting would get stronger year by year." And he went on: "In a limited sphere, differences of opinion are expressed more and more. Flattery receives patronage. Narrow feelings get importance. To overcome these shortcomings, to aspire high, we should dream to get appreciation for all, and establish ourselves."

There is no doubt that Orissa can achieve progress only when this consciousness is cultivated in our mind. The duty of Prajatantra Prachar Samiti is to raise this kind of consciousness and it is the duty of *Visuva Milana* to do the same. And this is also the primary duty of literature.

The mission behind organising *Visuva Milana* was (a) close interaction between writers, (b) to make creative writers more active and to establish cordial relationship between the established and budding writers and inaugurate a new and progressive tradition. While senior and junior writers meet during the *Visuva Milana*, their writings find place in the pages of *The Jhankar*, (c) to create a literary family in the state. And to strengthen this familial cordinal, congenial and integral relationship was his (Mahtab's) sole intention, (d) to attract writers to *The Jhankar* and *The Sunday Prajatantra*. He instituted awards and honours in different fields of literary activity. By honoring

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writers, artists, artisans and sports personalities, this intention has been fulfilled, (e) to invite eminent and established literary personalities from other states and to know through them about other Indian languages and literatures and in turn create a sense of goodwill and opportunities for Oriya language and writers. This strengthens literary traditions and creates conditions for a better creative environment (f) The speeches made by the guests at the *Visuva Milana* have opened up new horizons for researchers and readers of Oriya literature. It has created an atmosphere for Oriya readers and writers to get acquainted with other Indian writers and their works. (g) A poetry reading session is held in the Visuva Mandap (Podium) where acclaimed as well as young poets read their poems. A new enthusiasm is spontaneously created in the hearts of young poets. (h) Finally, *Visuva Milana* has started a literary movement in the entire state which has spread far and wide and reached every nook and corner of Orissa.

In May 1950 issue of *The Jhankar*, Mahtab wrote about *Visuva Milana*,

> On 13 April, *Visuva Milana* has been organised by Prajatantra Prachar Samiti. The detailed reports have been published elsewhere. We did not expect that so many writers would take part in this function. They did come from far off places on their own expenses. In fact, writers should meet at regular intervals. It enriches their experience and enhances their knowledge. After the *Visuva Milana*, they have gone back with a new kind of enthusiasm; we have got this information as well.
>
> This, in due course, would turn to an institution. We hope, next year, it would be held in a more organised manner.

From the day Mahtab started *Visuva Milana*, he was clear that this organisation achieves excellence and be acceptable

to all. On the eve of *Visuva Milana* in 1951, he wrote, "We are organising *Visuva Milana* at the end of the second year and welcoming the third. At least, for a day we can meet all our family members, exchange gifts of love. Those who have been contributing writings to our magazine, we are trying to greet them all. The detailed programmes have been published elsewhere. It would be published in the newspaper also. We wish all our family members to gather at our home and celebrate the third year and greet each other."

After the Visuva function, he subjected the event to a critical evaluation and wrote, "On 13 April, the annual *Visuva Milana* session was held. Prof. Artaballava Mohanty, presided over the meeting, an exhibition of books and periodicals was organised. Many old printing machines were displayed in an exhibition. This exhibition was appreciated by all the visitors. But the *Visuva Milana* meeting could not be held in an organised manner. For this no individual can be blamed. The literary meeting could not be streamlined. The post-lunch meeting and discussion of the writers could not be organised. We feel we could not treat our guests properly. The selection of writers and poets for awards was done within so short a period that it is quite natural that some errors might have crept in. For all this we hold ourselves responsible. It is a matter of utter shame and sorrow. We request our friends to forgive us. We have learnt from this year's experience, and we can assure you that this mistake would not be repeated in future. Despite all these shortcomings, many friends have enjoyed *Visuva Milana*. For its success, all the workers of Prajatantra Prachar Samiti have tried very hard."

Mahtab was always careful about how *Visuva Milana* could be organised in a better way, year after year. Before the third *Visuva Milana* function was held, he decided to bring out an annual issue of *The Jhankar*. This was double

the size of a regular issue of the magazine. He requested writers to contribute the best of their writings and asked the artists to promote the best of their paintings. Mahtab was also very careful about enrolling more and more writers, poets, novelists in this literary endeavour.

The celebration of the fourth *Visuva Milana* function was extended by one more day. The annual prize giving ceremony of *Meena Bazar* and *Nari Jagat* was also made a part of the *Visuva Milana* function. As a result, *Visuva Milana* became the convocation ceremony of all the cultural activities of the Prajatantra Prachar Samiti.

Every year on the eve of the *Visuva Milana*, Mahtab gave the writers a broad idea about *Visuva* and seek their cooperation and, after the function was over, he used to critically analyse the pros and cons of this literary gathering. By doing so, he turned *Visuva Milana* into a literary movement. Eminent scholar Dr Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, expressing deep appreciation for *Visuva Milana* said, "Dr Harekrushna Mahtab, a distinguished scholar and statesman of Orissa, has sought to bring Bengalis, Oriyas, Assamese, Maithalies, and others close to each other by instituting his *Visuva Milana* gatherings every year at Cuttack. Here writers and scholars from outside Orissa would be asked to get together and give addresses and exchange views through their own languages and through a language like Bengali or Oriya which most people in the gathering would understand. This has been a good idea and it has been partially successful as an experiment towards the cultural integration of the eastern states. This should be pondered over and continued even in modified and extended forms."

Responding positively to Mahtab's request many eminent writers came and delivered speeches from the *Visuva* podium. They included Dr Mayadhar Mansingh, Dr Artaballava Mohanty, Dr Raghuveer, Dr Suryakanta Bhuyan,

Dr Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, Dr Kalidas Nag, Krushnaji Panduranga Kulkarni, Mamawarekar, Manoj Basu, Viswanath Sathyamarayana, Ramdhari Singh 'Dinkar', Amrita Pritam, Uma Shankar Joshi, Veena Ray, Jainendra Kumar, Dr Humayun Kaveer, Premendra Mitra, Arthus Basen Berg, Trailokyanath Goswami, Maitreyee Devi, Satchhidanand Hiranda Vatsyayan, Sukumar Sen, Dr Ashutosh Bhattacharya, Dr K.S. Srinivas Iyangar, Chotte Narayan Sharma, A.L.Basam, D.Satchandandan, Justice Harihar Mahapatra, Dr John Bolton, Dr Dinesh Chandra Sarkar, Dr Ramnath Tripathy, Dr Debidas, Nihar Ranjan Ray, Dr Nambar Singh, R.S.Toman, Dr Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya , Dr Khudiram Das, Gangasaran Singh, Dr Bholabhai Patel, Dr Sambhunath Singh, Dr Dasarathi, Sisir Kumar Das, Dr Raja Rao, Surendra Jhad suman, Nayantara Sehgal, Prabhjot Kaur, Dr Raghuveer Sahaya, Dr C.Narayan Reddy, Dr Bhisham Sahni, Dr Kartar Singh Duggal, Kedarnath Singh, Samaresh Majumdar, Rajendra Yadav, Dr Gopichand Narang, Dr Vidya Niwas Mishra, Kalyanmayee Lada, Sukumar Ajhikode, Dr Shivram Karanath, Mujtaba Hussain, Navakanth Barua, Sarat Mukhopadhyaya, and others. In the absence of Dr Mahtab this trend has been continuing. *Visuva Milana* in true sense is a bridge between past, present and the future. Irrespective of caste, religion, race or language it is a great meeting ground. Dr Pathani Patnaik describes it in the following words, "Under the roof of *Visuva Milana* many great writers have been born and they are now well established in their respective fields. Their contribution is noteworthy in making our literature rich and glorious."

"The history of Oriya literature in the second half of the 20th century is the Prajatantra movement and the magic touch of Dr Mahtab's leadership in it. Whatever experiments had been carried out in Oriya literature in this half-century and whatever success has been achieved, its prime source

of inspiration is *The Jhankar* literary movement and the literary gathering at the *Visuva Pandal.*"

In the words of Chintamani Behera, "In contemporary society, when political intrigues is the go of the day, *Visuva Milana* has enriched oriya literature.The famous writer Anton Chekhov once said, "Great writers engage in politics only in so far as it is necessary to defend people against politics."

8

MAHTAB, THE LITTERATEUR

It is said that politics and literature never go together. But Mahtab's life provides an exception to this rule. As he writes in his autobiography, "I am as much interested in politics, as in literature.They have become so much a part of my life that I hardly find any difference between the two. The time I refer to was a turbulent one, politically as well as from an administrative point of view. But my literary pursuits were left undisturbed."

Right from his childhood Mahtab was deeply interested in literature. As he says, "While studying in the village primary school, I retold stories from the *Ramayana*. As the *Pala* singers composed their songs extempore, I thought why should I not follow their footsteps? While a student in Ravenshaw College, Mahtab brought out a handwritten Oriya literary monthly *Malaya* and handwritten English weekly *The Dustbin*. In *The Utkal Dipika* his English writings were published regarding police atrocities in Cuttack city and unruly behaviour of officials.

During the hey day of the freedom struggle he published a weekly news bulletin called *Swaraj Samachar* to spread the message of the freedom movement among the general public. Mahtab wrote his first novel fiction *Ajob Duniya* (A Strange World) while a prisoner in the Bhagalpur jail in 1922-23. About this work he says, "The novel was so emotionally charged that, after reading it, some friends of mine broke down. That kind of language and emotion is

not in use any more. Because life was very simple then and it was not that difficult to be tried in life and burnt it."

Mahtab also wrote a book in English titled *Free Thinking*. But the manuscript was lost. A portion of this book was published by Laxminarayan Sahu in *The Star of Utkal*.

In 1923, Mahtab started publishing the weekly, The *Prajatantra*. Its chief objectives were to popularise Gandhian principles and the programme of constructive work. Regarding inhuman exploitation of the ruler of Kanika, he wrote an English article in *Adventure*. He also wrote a monograph titled *Nilagiri Atrocities*.

Mahtab published a poem titled *Punyatma Gopabandhu* (Gopabandhu, a noble soul). He also wrote *Chasa Bhai* (Brother Farmers) and *Palashi Abasane* (The end of Battle of Plassey). The latter was banned by the government. While a prisoner in the Hajaribagh Jail Mahtab translated the *Ramayana* from Sanskrit to Oriya. He had also rendered the *Gita* into simple Oriya, which has remained unpublished till date.

In 1930-31, Mahtab was in Patna jail. There he wrote a poem titled *Badhira Jhanjhan* (The jingles of flood). In 1947, it was published as *Nigada Niswana*. During his stay in Patna jail he wrote two plays. One of these *Swaraj Sadhana* (Achievement of self-rule) was staged twice there. While in Hajaribagh jail he wrote another novel titled *Nutana Dharma* (New Religion) which was his first novel to get into print. During that period he wrote *Dasa Barshara Orissa* (Ten years of Orissa), which was published in 1935. In 1945, Mahtab was shifted to Ahmednagar fort where he wrote three epics, three novels and many poems. He also started writing a history of Orissa while there. The three epics were: *Chari Chakshu* (Four eyes), *Atmadan* (Self Sacrifice) and *Jivana Samasya* (Troubles of Life) and the novels were *Tautar Pratibha* and *Avyapar*.

In 1949 Mahtab published his autobiography *Sadhanara*

Pathe (Towards the Goal). From 1950, Mahtab started writing his *Gaon Majlis* column in *The Prajatantra*.These columns have been collected and published in several volumns. Three other volumes under the title *Sahityara Marga Unmochan* (Opening a Path for literature) have been published. These contained the editorials he had contributed to the literary journal *The Jhankara*. In 1956 he published a collection of poems titled *Chaya Pathara Yatra* (Traveller of the Shadowy Path) and in 1959, a one act play *Yuga Sanketa* (Symbol of the Age). A Political novel titled *Trutiya Parva* (The Third phase) and a short story collection titled *Swaragare Emergency* (Emergency in Heaven) were published in 1977 and 1975 respectively. The year 1982 saw the publication of collection of his articles titled *Sahitya Alochana* (Comments on Literature). *While serving my Nation* came out in 1986 and was followed by *Arab Sagararu Chilika* (From the Arabian Sea to Chilika) in 1987. In 1994 *Sadhus and Santhas of Orissa* & *Saints of Orissa* were published. This included his *Jhankara* editorials in which we find the editorial on Gandhi's assassination titled *Sesha Ashru* (The last drop of tear) and *Bhakta Jivani* (Life of Devotees). In 1964, Mahtab had delivered a lecture 'Gandhi, the political leader' which was published in 1965 and was subsequently reprinted in an extended form in 1973. Dr Harekrushna Mahtab Foundation has published his other works such as *Kankalara Kahani* (Story of Skeleton) *Vishnupurana Bhitirikatha* (The Inner story of Vishnupurana) and *Sri Ganeshanka Patha Padha* (Lord Ganesha as a student). These are all excellent books meant for children.

Right from his childhood till the last breath of his life, Mahtab remained keenly interested in literature. He has enriched Oriya literature by writing short stories, novels, one-act plays, essays and features, children's literature, history of Orissa and autobiography.

Mahtab: The Writer of Short Stories

By the time Mahtab started writing short stories this branch of Oriya literature had already become very rich. Mahtab was very intimately associated with the public life of both pre and post- independent Oriya society as he was a freedom fighter, social worker and reformer. The prime objective of his creation was revolutionary reform and raising social consciousness. Hence his short stories sought to present picture of political, social, familiar and real life experiences. In many of his stories like *Hrudayara* (Of the heart), *Nua Chalani* (A New lifestyle), *Dasa Barasa Pare* (After Ten Years), *Bhikarira Jabab* (Replies of a Beggar), *Congressia* (The Congressman), *Babanabhuta* (The Ghost), *Epari bi hue* (This also Happens), *Dharmasala* (Guest House),one comes across a vivid image of the political world. The stories are realistic too. While many of his stories are centered on some incidents, some express deep feelings and explore the inner lives of characters. *Swargare Emergency* is a symbolic short story. Other stories such as *Gharoi* (The Homely One), *Phatak Babu* (The Man at the Gate) *Emergency, Premara Parinam* (Outcome of Love), *Rickshawwala* (The Rickshaw - puller), *To Lagi Chhati Pathara* (The heart is a stone) *S.Naik, Savitri, Durvikshya* (The Famine), *Bhata Handiru Gotie* (A Single Gram from the Rice Bowl) etc. present a picture of prevailing social and economic conditions. His biographical stories include *Eka* (Alone), *Mo Nija Gapa* (My own story), *Upakramanika* (Introduction), *Aparanhara Uddipana* (A Sensation in the Afternoon), *Brudhara Prarthana* (The Prayer of an Old Man) *Se Parira Daka* (Call of the Other World) etc.

Short stories of Dr Mahtab expressed his intense feelings although his stories are prosaic and flat, yet in some cases readers' heart is flowing like a perennial stream. In his short story *Adhuna* (The Present) what is told is not important but how it is told. However his stories have a strong narrative thrust. He has applied both colloquial and urban language

in his writings. And the style was his own.

In his own words: "Every writer has a language and style of his own. A reader while reading a story can easily sense who the writer is. Many say that the way language is used has bore the imprint of my own unique style. I feel very happy at this remark".

Mahtab as a Novelist

The novel is another important form of prose writing. In this field, the literary modernite finds expression. A story is the primary material of a novel. A novel without a theme or story is like a creature without a backbone. About the background to his novel-writing Mahtab writes: "As I was always associated with social events, my thinking has a significant social dimension. So my literary creations are society-centric. Politics is closely connected to society. Hence literature and politics are also intimately related. Therefore his novels rest on a strong social and political foundation. His first four novels, *Nutana Dharma, Tautar, Avyapar* and *Pratibha* were written during the hey-day of the freedom struggle. The two novels that followed these, *Trutiya Parva* and *1975* were written when he had already distanced himself from power politics.

Nutana Dharma was a social reform-oriented novel. In this novel the reader encounters events like social movements and evils such as exploitation by Zamindars, the Swadeshi movement, widow remarriages. About this novel he says, "The *harijan* question which exercised Mahatma Gandhi's mind one and half years later did cross my mind then and I wrote *Nutana Dharma*. We have to bring about complete eradication of untouchability which implies a complete abolition of the caste-system. Based on this I wrote the novel."

On *Nutana Dharma*, novelist Surendra Mohanty wrote: "In this novel we find how the social elite of Orissa looked

down upon the Congress institution when the messages of Gandhiji was initially gaining ground in the state. Mahtab's social reform work was also influenced by the Goudiya Vaishnavite Priests and Chieftains."

Another bold initiative in this direction was Mahtab's novel *Pratibha* based on a socio-political theme. It was written against the backdrop of freedom movement. In this we find pictures of the nationalist movement, social conditions, and the caste system. It expresses the spirit of fellow-feeling, sacrifice and power of love. This novel was inspired by Gandhian ideology and was enriched by a socio-political consciousness. He wrote this novel to put his time in jail to meaningful use.To write this novel he deeply introspected into his own life. In it he dealt with the caste system, the *purdah* system, removal of illiteracy, and social evils, relinquishment of government service, and adoption of ideology like celibacy etc. It is his own real- life experience which make *Pratibha* such a lively and vibrant work of fiction.

In the opinion of the critic, Chintamani Das, "All the incidents and events described in the novel have something either with his own encounters with life or a closely related to them. Hence, readers find the situation depicted in *Pratibha* so credible and convincing."

The other famous novel which was written during his stay in the Ahmednagar jail is *Avyapar*. These also reflected insights gained through his own experience of life. The freedom movement, establishment of *ashrams*, the Gadjat movement, the non-violent struggle for independence, spinning and the movement to spread women's education form the background to this novel. The vivid industrialisation, of a rapidly changing social environment enriched this novel. The action of the novel revolved around the movement against the tyrannical Gadjat rulers of Orissa, the caste problem which gave birth to prostitution, the

exploitation of innocent Oriya girls in the Calcutta City, the food scarcity that had gripped the rural areas of Orissa, the problem arising out of educated young men marrying illiterate brides etc.

Justifying the title *Avyapar* Brajamohan Mohanty writes: "It was a non-affair during pre-independence days to come forward to serve the nation as well as to have one's own family, to tie oneself in the affairs of love is a non-affair, to fulfill the wish of a woman and keep her happy was a non-affair and to act as a patriot and love one's own life is also a non-affair." Another memorable novel from Mahtab's pen was the outcome of Mahtab's stay in the Ahmednagar jail. It was titled *Tautar* (The Tout) and in it Mahtab portrayed the picture of an indisciplined and self-killing society. Critics are of the opinion that the novel, which dramatises the impact of the Gandhian movement on the nation, is one of the major works of Oriya literature. Some see it as a novel about political issue. Others are of the view that since there is always a need for social reform, *Tautar* as a novel can never be forgotten. It is true that this novel has helped in consolidating the Oriya novel in its formative years.

Trutiya Parva (The third phase) seeks to convey the essence of the Indian democratic system. This was his first literary creation. About the title of the novel, Mahtab says, "After the completion of two phases of the history of Indian freedom struggle, the third phase is a new unfolding. The first phase lasted from 1921 to 1946. The second phase of 24 years stretched from 1947 to 1971 which refer to government led by the freedom fighters. And the third phase is constituted by the outcome of this rule.

In this novel Mahtab has portrayed a picture of how the freedom fighters power politics after independence, others lost interest in governance and there was a general disenchantment among the youth. He also draws a vivid picture of the fighting that was the result of self-centered

power politics. The importance of this novel is not confined to its being a pure literary work. It gives reader an idea about the language, philosophy and dimensions of the contemporary Indian political scenario.

Dr Mahtab's novel "1975" was published in 1979. During the Emergency Mahtab became a prisoner. He had already experienced the exploitation and torture in pre-independence India. He did not shy away from criticising the post-independent system of governance. His fighting spirit did not allow him to merely accept this mis-rule. This novel excels in giving a complete picture of a country gripped by fear, anxiety, apprehension and helplessness. Incidents are analysed and characters are portrayed keeping that time of turbulence in mind. Mahtab's character embody in some way or the other his own philosophy of life and work culture. Another feature of his novels is that all his novels are male-oriented. Even children and aged people are absent. But, the few women characters he has created, have been glorified.

The famous critic Henry James observes that when a powerful writer matures, we find a reflection of life and society at their totality in his writings and this is the best gift of his to society. Mahtab's experiences had an impressive sweep and breadth. Hence, we find a fulfillment of his life's philosophy in his works. Although he tried his hand at almost all branches of literature, he no doubt excelled in creating a few fine novels, on which rests his fame as a writer.

Not only Oriya literature, we hardly find Mahtab's parallel in Indian literature. He wrote several political stories and novels based on his imagination and experience. Yet these writings reflect his own experience of life personality in such a masterly manner that they have become literature par excellence. In a true novel, the writer's own life is reflected directly or indirectly. Hence, his personality is to be found in some character or the other in his novels. Mahtab

was no exception. His novels gain strength from the reflection of his personality in them. His novels are therefore not only literary creations, but also are documents which bear witness to the richness of national life in its heyday.

Mahtab, the Poet

Mahtab has written many poems. In the turbulent life of a political figure, Mahtab had a poetic heart, and he composed many a poem. About his poetic personality he writes: "When in the scorching sun, the ploughman unties his bullocks and returns home, he sits down under the *banyan* or *peepal* tree on his way home to take a little rest. At that moment, when he looks around him his heart leaps up and he sings a melodious song. He knows little about music. He listened to these on many occasions, which charmed his heart. And he sings these because in the scorching sun, he has found a little shed. His poetic inspiration is kept suppressed by the need to do hard labour. My literary pursuit is similar to this. When I was in jail during the freedom struggle I felt the coolness of that tree-shed. My mind naturally inclined towards literature. I don't know if I had any special talent in this area."

Mahtab's poetic creations include, long poems, two poetic plays, a poetry collection, occasional poems written and published in different times. They are: *Sesha Ashru* (The last drop of tear) *Atmadana* (Self sacrifice), *Punyatma Gopabandhu* (Gopabandhu, the noble soul), *Chasabhai* (The farmer brother) etc. Some long poems which had been published in the past, are unavailable to-day. Apart from this *Nigada Niswana* (The Deep Sound) written during his days in jail is also out of print.

Mahtab's poetic play *Atmadana* is based on the freedom movement and the importance of Gandhian principles. He had tried to spread the Gandhian principle of non-violent *satyagraha* (Love for truth) in this. He writes:

When I praise this ascetic soul,
My heart is content.
I forget all my familial sorrows,
Glimpse a ray of happiness in the dark.

As a dry pool receives a little water
during summer shower
The dry soul of mine is filled with joy.

As Nityananda Satpathy, 'the critic' observes: "One can never miss the social relevance of Mahtab's poetry."

In almost all Mahtab's writings one feels the pulse of patriotism and love for the motherland. A humanist vision is also enriched in them. The British Government banned his long poem *Palasi Abasane* (The end of the Battle of Plassey). In this poetic work Mahtab said, "The day the British merchants unfurled the flag of victory in the battle of Plassey, on that very day, Mother India stood in shackles. The battle of Plassey is a famous event in the history of India. British historians have painted Shiraj-ud-Daullah in a very negative light. Lord Clive has been glorified by them. Fortunately, some Indian historians have unearthed many untold stories by going through the documents published during company rule. What happened to the people associated with this battle, and what was their real character. The poem seeks to provide answers to the events. This was completely a historical document and there is nothing fictitious about it."

It portrayed the real character of the British. Hence, it was quite natural that it would be banned. He wrote:

An incarnation of treachery
the lies mingled with blood and religion
It was unimaginable in politics
(Yet), the British proudly embraced this.

Although *Sesha Ashru* is called a long poem, this actually comprised of two poetic plays, three poems and six pieces of prose. This expressed deep gratitude to Mahatma Gandhi on the occasion of his sad demise. Mahtab expressed his unmixed loyalty to Gandhi throughout his life of struggle. He writes:

Who would now smile on us?
Ask after our well-being with paternal care?
Who would forgive and bear with us
Hundreds of differences in hundreds of urchins
Who would establish that simple equality?
Indulgent to our varied differences

Discussion on poetry was not his cup of tea. He never aspired to be regarded as a poet. These lines are only a reflection of his feelings. Regarding writing poetry, he expressed his own view in the following words: "Through scientific discussion, human knowledge has spread to such an extent that there is no place for simple belief. Nor is there any scope for spontaneity in emotion. Hence, poetry is increasingly becoming intellectual instead of being emotional. But human heart responds more to emotion than to intellect. This is the prime reason why modern poetry fails to touch our hearts."

Through exposure to politics Mahtab turned into a philosopher. In many a poem he depicted his life's philosophy. In *Utha Dokanira Notice* (Notice of a Street Vendor) he expressed an emotional and intimate message:

Show this notice to all
Be gracious,
To let this street-vendor pack his things
Give him some time,
This story ends here
Prepare now for the other fair,

I shall be nowhere
Turn into a street beggar.

Mahtab, the Author of One-Act Plays

Mahtab wrote about twenty one-act plays, out of which ten have been compiled under the title *Yuga Samketa* (Symbol of the Age). His one-act plays are as much political and social as his novels and short stories. But they are not incident-oriented. His success as a one-act play writer is recognised by all. Instead of choosing love he picked up the social evolution of man as his central theme. In this regard he was the first successful writer. Among his successful one-act plays, *Rupantara* (Metamorphosis), *Yuga Samketa* (The Symbol of Age), *Gupta Pranaya* (A Secret Love Affair), *Uttarottara* (One Stage after the other), *Itihasara Parihasa* (Mockery of History), *Andha Yuga* (The Blind Age) *Prabanchana* (The Treachery) are notable. They reflect the political, social and cultural life of contemporary society. Mahtab was not a playwright, nor did he want to earn a name by writing one-act plays. So, he did not try to create any dramatic situation in his one-act plays either. It seems, he did not concentrate his efforts on this literary form.

Drama as an art form seeks to express the feelings of one's heart. According to Hudson, "It is life's impartial and impersonal reflection." Although his one-act plays are not significant from the point of view of language, symbolism and intellect, Mahtab's selection of themes, his presentation and analysis of these elements added value to his plays.

Mahtab as an Essayist

Mahtab was a distinguished essayist and a writer of prose. No aspect relating to life and society was alien to Mahtab's thought-processes and writing. Since he had embraced literature as a duty, his pen analysed almost every aspect of society and the essay was the most powerful medium for

this. Right from *Gaon Majlis* to his autobiography *Sadhanara Pathe* (In the Path of Sadhana), *Gandhiji O' Odisha* (Gandhiji and Odisha) and *Odisha Itihasa* (History of Orissa) have established him as a major writer of prose in Oriya literature.

If Mahtab's essays are carefully analysed one would find how they have enriched the cultural life of Orissa.

From his prose writings it is quite evident that he was in the front rank of Oriya writers. In his autobiography Mahtab seldom glorified his own personality. Essays are the mirrors of one's personality. The critic Chintamani Behera writes: "In his relationship with the outside world there is passion, realism and speculation. At places there is an amalgamation of independence of thought, research and aestheticism. He can render any complex issue accessible to the common man by using simple, persuasive language. Essays can generally be classified into subjective or objective, introspective or extrovert, personal or impersonal, and creative or news-like writings."

In his autobiography *Sadhanara Pathe* Dr Mahtab narrates his life's struggle and missions. This book is considered a milestone in Oriya literature. In this book one can find a clear and complete picture of the freedom struggle in Orissa. So this will help others to write their autobiographies in future. This is also a piece of successful prose writing. Here, let us throw some light on autobiography-writing. The question arises: why a man wants to write his own life story? Does he want to justify his own deeds? Does he want to compare himself with his contemporaries or, does he want to define and secure his place in history?

In one sense, it can be said that autobiographies are written to eulogise one's own deeds and personality for the simple reason that no one wants to be completely forgotten by others or recede into oblivion. Man does not remember everything. Whatever is written goes on record for ever. In this sense, autobiography is not written merely to

chronologically arrange incidents, but from these a picture is painted to show if a man is successful or unsuccessful in life. Sometimes, he/she very objectively and honestly analyses his/her own life and presents it the way he/ she has lived it.

In the process of writing one's autobiography, a person wants to introduce a new dimension of his/her personality to the readers. It is only written at the fag end of one's life because all one's hopes and aspirations have died down by then. Only a few memories are worth remembered. All other memories deserve to be forgotten. If all such memories are only beautiful, the person wouldn't try to write down his/ her memoir. Here, the statement made in *The Partial View* by Somerset Maugham is worth quoting. He said, "I must write as though I was a person of importance, and indeed I am to myself. To myself, I am the most important person in the world; though I do not forget that, not even taking into consideration so grand a conception as the Absolute, but from the standpoint of common sense, I am of no consequence whatever. It would have made small difference to the universe if I had never existed. Though I may seem to write as though significance must necessarily be attached to certain of my works, I mean only that they are of moment to me for the purpose of any discussion during which I may have occasion to mention them."

While writing an autobiography, one should honestly present the truth and only the truth. It does not necessarily mean presenting the whole truth before the readers. Because, by doing so, he might express his own views in the absence of his/ her other contemporaries. No one is supposed to give his/ her comments on others. It is for others or the posterity to evaluate what is right or wrong. One should be very careful while writing on contemporary issues or personalities.

Mahtab has demonstrated how a good autobiography

should be written. Some other writers have also given their own opinions and comments on Mahtab in their biographies or autobiographies. No one has ever commented on or countered *Sadhanara Pathe*. Nor did they have pointed out any factual errors. It seems, Mahtab took utmost care to present time, place and persons while writing his autobiography. He even was conscious about the future. In many places, while glorifying his own personality or deeds, he never failed to give due credit to his fellow compatriots.

Idealist leaders like Nabakrushna Choudhury worked in Mahtab Ministry. About two ministerial colleagues he writes: "I bow my head whenever I remember colleagues in my ministry. One rarely find such loyal and honest friends. My colleagues had so much faith in me that I never had to consult them before taking a decision on any issue at any time. This was the result of our mutual faith and understanding. They had so much faith in me that I feel myself fortunate in such trustworthy friends. Nobody can believe today that as the Chief Minister I gave replies to all questions on behalf of my colleagues and neither the ministers nor any other members of the house objected to this practice. I had taken this decision to keep the entire administration in my control and my colleagues fully supported me in this regard."

Mahtab had gone beyond criticism, as he had made his leadership acceptable to everybody by appreciating the greatness of his fellow colleagues.

A successful autobiography enables a reader to immerse himself in it and feel that he is a part of it. In this sense Dr Mahtab's autobiography has motivated many eminent personalities to write their life stories. In the conclusion Dr Mahtab has written. "As I stand in the mid -point of my life, I proceed further while reminiscing about the past. Time is flowing fast like a river. Who can keep track of all the incidents in one's self? If properly narrated every single

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incident can be a life story." The facts Mahtab has incorporated into his autobiography can help in writing a history of modern Orissa.

Like his autobiography, *Odisha Itihasa* (History of Orissa) is Dr Mahtab's another significant work. He started working on this project while imprisoned in Ahmednagar Fort. About this book, Dr Krushna Chandra (K.C.) Panigrahi observes: "If someone wants to have a broad view about the history of Orissa, every common reader, student or teacher, has to depend on the history of Prof. Rakhal Das Banerjee and Dr Harekrushna Mahtab. Many say that in both the books there are lots of deficiencies. No book is absolutely error-free; nor does anyone claim that their books are free from lapses. But the combined effort of many historians for long thirty years could not equal the work which these two historians have done. Hence, both of them deserve our respect." Mahtab had tried to write this history of Orissa in right earnest. Dr K.C.Panigrahi wrote in this regard: "I welcomed the history of Orissa written by him. But his views on the Keshari dynasty were not acceptable to me. In his description of the Keshari, there were so many fake names, which I have pointed in many of my essays." Mahtab removed the chapters on Madalapanji and the Keshari dynasty in the revised edition of his book.

Odisha Itihasa received praise from historians, critics and writers. He had made a great contribution to the formation of the modern state of Orissa. Likewise, he also tried to write the history of Orissa in order to give Oriyas a separate identity. He discussed at length Lord Jagannath as Oriyas take pride in Jagannath as their deity and symbol both within and outside the state. In this regard, he writes, "I felt that it was required to discuss the Jagannath as cult in the *Odisha Itihasa*. Keeping this in mind, for the first time, I wrote on this issue. I think that was the beginning of research on Lord Jagannath and his religious rites."

Historian Kanchanmoy Majumdar wrote about this history book: "The few complete history books we find on Orissa in a scientific manner, Dr Mahtab's history is the best of all. This is essential to know about the growth of the Oriya people."

Of this book Dr Mayadhar Mansingh wrote, "The political leader, Dr Harekrushna Mahtab is also known as an Oriya writer. To utilise his term in prison in Ahmednagar jail creatively, he started writing on Orissa's history. As a result, we got a new history of Orissa from him. This history is full of facts, yet we cannot say that this bears as much literary value." Here, it seems, had Mahtab not written the *Odisha Itihasa*, as a politician, he would not have chosen Bhubaneswar as the capital of modern Orissa and, despite all hurdles, he would not have given a true picture of it. On 13 April, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru laid the foundation of the modern capital city of Bhubaneswar and, on this occasion Mahtab said, "Right from 3rd century B.C. this place enjoys prominence in the history of Orissa. Bhubaneswar has grown as an important place for the Buddhist, Jains and Saivaites. This historic capital city bears witness to the rise and fall of many dynasties. Nowhere in India, nor in the world, we find any city which has enjoyed so much prominence for long 2500 years like Bhubaneswar. Today, we are going to establish the modern capital of Orissa. For our capital many valuable materials are available here. Here we find inscriptions of Ashoka the great to Emperor Kharavela and that of Kapilendra Deva. These inscriptions are sources of our ancient pride.

Mahtab would not have chosen Bhubaneswar as the modern capital city of Orissa, had he not investigated its past as a historian. Surendra Mohanty opined that it was a wrong decision to choose Bhubaneswar as the state capital. However Mahtab proved all his critics wrong by taking this decision as a wise statesman.

In appreciation of his contribution as the writer of the history of Orissa, Andhra University in 1950, Utkal University in 1956 and Sagar University in 1958 conferred on him honorary doctorate degrees.

The facts used in some pre-independence novels in Oriya literature can be found in Dr Mahtab's history. The first Oriya novel is *Padmamali* which was written by Umesh Chandra Sarkar. This novel is based on historical facts. The writer did not take any ancient story; rather he chose an incident of the first half of the nineteenth century.

Fakir Mohan, the father of Oriya novel, based his *Lachhama* on the story of the conflict between the Mughals and the Mahrattas. On one side was Nawab Alibardee Khan and on the other, it was the Maratha general, Bhaskar Pandit. They were constantly at war. Badal Singh won the confidence of the Nawab by his sheer bravery, heroism and cleverness. He secretly devised a plan in collusion with the Nawab to kill Bhaskar Pandit. As a result, he brought Bhaskar Pandit to his army camp and killed. History substantiates this fact. Mahtab always carried out research on his own. He always encouraged and requested researchers to find new facts and bring these to the notice of the general public. Research means searching again and again. And this requires perseverance as well as impartial and logical enquiry. Dismissing research on the *Ramayana* Mahtab said, "Treating any ancient epic as history it has no social relevance or necessity." Exposing his own opinion about research, he said, "Any historical or archaeological research, before it is acceptable to experts and scholars, should not be made public. This hampers true research and creates unnecessary confusion. Therefore, influence of any pre-conceived view on research is undesirable. This is against the spirit of true research. Whatever synthesis comes out of an independent research, should be accepted."

Mahtab wrote many editorials on numerous historical topics in *The Jhankar*. These reflected his deep understanding of historical issues. He also advised all the noted historians to come together and pursue the study of history and conduct further research. Historical research should be examined from different angles. If something is not examined in this way, it will never be established as historical truth. Wherever any issue is raised without the support of proper research Mahtab voiced his concern and never failed to criticise it. Some paintings of an established painter Upendra Kishore Das were exhibited and to explain those paintings a booklet was brought out. Mahtab found some factual errors in the booklet and immediately commented, "It is not desirable to spread misconceptions in an exhibition of excellence."

Mahtab always laid stress on respect for historical truth in literature. To determine the time of the literary form, *Kalasa*, Professor Gouri Kumar Brahma criticised the opinion given by eminent litterateur Artaballav Mohanty. Prof. Bansidhar Mohanty also put forth other relevant facts. In this regard, Mahtab wrote, "At this stage this much can be said that to determine the time of Kalasa, Artaballava Mohanty's analysis is not complete. His is also not justified as Brahma has criticised him on the basis of an inconclusive fact. While discussing history of Oriya literature, the inquisitive critics should rely on historical facts. It is not safe and healthy to depend on hypothesis or controversial facts to come to any conclusion."

Mahtab did not confine his creative pursuit to historical research; rather, he transformed it to literary creations, because to him literature and history are inseparable from each other. Whatever truth history reveals, it cannot touch the heart of society without the help of literature. If history is skeleton, literature is its flesh and blood. About history and literature he wrote, "Even if history does not present

the truth, whatever comes from people's mouth also bears an historical element. And this element enriches literature. The best example of this is Pandit Gopabandhu's *Dharmapada*, 'Whether twelve hundred carpenters matter or does the son' was the idea from which this poem creation was born. *Dharmapada's* greatness was also established along with that of Konark. Based on this poem numerous works have been written in different Indian languages. Under the influence of literature, *Dharmapada* has been transformed into a historic character. For this, the writer Gopabandhu is remembered forever."

Had Mahtab not been a true researcher, he would not place so much emphasis on the need for historical investigation. Writing an editorial titled 'Orissa History Congress' he wrote, "The historians of Orissa who are pursuing their research for doctoral degree or those who have already got it, are not present at this Congress. History also requires critical analysis and constructive criticism. So one's research on any given topic of history should form matter for another man's analysis. This lapse was observed in the Orissa History Congress Convention at Sambalpur and also repeated in the Indian History Congress Convention at Bhubaneswar. Difference of opinion on historical issues should not hamper basic historical research. This is my sincere hope."

It is clear that Mahtab occupies a special position among the historians of Orissa.

9

REFORMER AND ADVOCATE OF HUMAN RIGHTS

As a statesman Mahtab was always conscious of the importance of human rights. Human rights are nothing but the history of human civilisation. Expressing his opinion about human rights, he wrote, "Every individual has the right to express his free opinion and pursue his activities. From the administrative point of view, government should honour the self-respect and dignity of every individual. Everyone has the natural right of self-defence and government should not punish anybody without a proper trial. To sum up, it can be said that in every field human beings' dignity should be recognised and the right to this is called the human rights. Human rights encompass the right to live, the right to education, the right to health, the right to work etc. These are interrelated." Whenever any incident of human rights violation occurred, Mahtab never hesitated to raise his strong voice and wage war against it. In political life, although he had occupied many important positions, his frank opinion and sense of judgement created a sensation.

He expressed his concern in the *Gaon Majlis* column about police firing on the East Bengal refugees in Koraput, the forcible collection of tax from farmers in Sambalpur, the famine-like situation prevailing in Khariar, the firing in Rayagada, Telengana riot, the problems faced by teachers and students, police man-handling of passengers in Adra

station, disparities in relief distribution, political leaders giving patronage to violence, inhuman behaviour of the police towards patients in hospitals, maltreatment against *harijans* by caste hindus and the excesses of emergency etc. He raised his strong voice of disapproval in *Gaon Majlis* columns wherever he came across any violation of human rights. Not only this, he also called upon people to be conscious about it. He wrote justifying such a movement, "Unless people become conscious about their own rights, many would try to make them so; nobody can check this."

Reminiscing about the good old days of the freedom struggle and the days of emergency Mahtab wrote,

> "Such a situation was created in the country when people thought duty as their primary concern than human rights. It was considered that a complete democratic system was not an effective system of governance, taking the situation then prevailing in the country into account. Hence, internal emergency was declared. Constitution was drastically overhauled. People were in constant fear about expressing their opinion or while writing about something. The government, instead of becoming the representative of the people turned to be policy-maker. Kings used to be accompanied by soldiers or police, to show off their power. Now-a-days there are kings and their subjects have become voters. This demonic security system does not fit into the democratic form of governance. It is an unlawful act to terrorise people who are already terrified.The police are not responsible for this. It is those who try to display their wealth and power through the police who should be held responsible. Voters' role is not to be mute observers. They have to be prepared to play an active role in this situation.
>
> A great nation's ideology is affected by this emergency. People have lost their moral strength for

fear of the government. It is as if a foreign army has occupied this country and the victorious soldiers plunder it. Under the protection of some court, officials of a few gadjat states tortured people. Similar activities are being carried out by some unscrupulous officers under the cover of emergency. Nobody could object to them."

Mahtab sought to create public opinion by giving glaring examples of human rights violation in his *Gaon Majlis* column. In the editorial columns of *The Prajatantra,* he did not spare any opportunity to his bold and impartial opinion. When Allahabad High Court invalidated Indira Gandhi's election, public opinion demanded her resignation. Mahtab in his *Gaon Majlis* column discussed the matter under the title *Srimatinka Mamala.* This was considered an unpardonable crime and he was arrested under Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA).

Mahtab was a statesman. Hence his vision was far-reaching. It was not confined by any boundaries. He had realised the importance of the struggle started by Jai Prakash Narayan before emergency. Because when human rights are violated, public agitation is the only alternative and there was no path in between. Mahtab had realised this truth from his own experience. So he wrote an article under the title *Impact of the Jai Prakash flood.* In that article he observed,

> The Jai Prakash revolution has caused a great flood throughout the country. At many places it would overflow, new lagoons would be created, many trees would be uprooted, and many new streams would be created. No political party would sit silently in a situation like this. Outside political parties, Gandhians could keep themselves silent. This is a great flood.

Human rights are a part of people's education. To

spread such education Mahtab utilised his *Gaon Majlis* column. He had always tried honestly to let the people know, realise and learn this. He believed that,

> It is as important to run the government as to let people learn how to run the administration. It is not simply democracy to get votes and become a minister. It is essential for a successful democracy to manage every aspect of administration and what is to be done where and how.

Mahtab very boldly expressed his opinion against imposing one's own rights on others, because this creates hindrances for introduction of equal rights for all in the society. Here, Mahtab stepped into the role of a social reformer. This social claim was derived from the principle of *Varnashrama*. This also created casteism. He expressed his displeasure as this is prevalent in politics. He wrote, "Indian politics is gradually taking the place of caste system. And, for this, society is heading towards another form of social bondage. Indian societies so entangled in casteism that right from Gautam Buddha's time to the present day, despite all efforts it has not been freed from this. Once religion was the main hindrance in politics in the western countries. Today, the casteism has entered politics in our country and leading it in a wrong direction."

Mahtab raised his voice against animal sacrifice in Hindu temples. On 9 October 1985, he wrote in his *Gaon Majlis* column, titled *Danger for Goats*. An advertisement was published for fixation of fees for goat sacrifice in Chandi temple in Cuttack. Mahtab wrote reacting to this advertisement, "It was clearly mentioned in the advertisement that the Temple Committee wants to get rid of this system. Yet, it is continued keeping people's wish in mind." Mahtab's piece was stronglyworded. He said, "Which class of people wants this (sacrifice)? According to

the five principles of *Tantra*, wine and sex are also permissible and this would attract many people. If a wine house and a brothel are opened near the Chandi temple, more and more devotees would visit the shrine and the youth would benefit. As this kind of vague argument is not subscribed to, goat sacrifice should also be criticised in the same manner. He went on, "A civil movement should be organised to stop the goat sacrifice in the Chandi temple." He did not stop at this but met the Endowment Commissioner and discussed with him possibilities of putting a stop to this heinous practice. When not much happened, a meeting of people of Cuttack city was held under the presidentship of Justice Harihar Mohapatra and it was decided that 500 *satyagrahis* would sit on a *dharna* (protest) in front of Chandi temple on the Mahashtami day. Mahtab tried to arouse public consciousness and succeeded in stopping this cruel practice. He also dared to stop this practice in Sri Mandira in Puri, Biraja temple in Jaipur, Charchika temple in Banki, Bhattarika temple in Badamba through *The Prajatantra*.

Once Gopal Chandra Tripathy wrote an article and sent it to *The Prajatantra* regarding the sacrifices near goddess Bimala inside the premises of Sri Jagannath temple. The title of this article was *Sakta Gundicha* or *Devi Gundicha* in *Sri Kshetra*. In this article Tripathy presented many arguments justifying animal sacrifices near Lord Jagannath.

Mahtab wrote in *The Prajatantra* only one day after publication of that article, "Many thanks to Gopal Chandra Tripathy for bringing to public notice this secret practice carried on inside the Jagannath temple.

If it were the wish of Lord Jagannath, the temple would not have been plundered again and again or the deity would not have been shifted from the temple and kept hidden from the attackers. This incident should not be forgotten. The servitors should know this much about Lord Jagannath that

the deity remains alive by the religious austerities of his servitors. If they deviate from their path of austerity, the deity will be reduced to a mere log of wood and the Supreme Soul would vanish from it." Advising the servitors he wrote, "Stop this sacrificial practice and invite the Purosottama (The Supreme Purusha God) to Srimandira."

When the culprits in connection with the killing of three school children in Ranpur were not caught, Mahtab wrote expressing his deep displeasure, "This proves the inefficiency of administration. If investigation failed to find the culprits, punitive should have imposed on that area. The people who hide the crime are subject to general punishment."

Mahtab possessed the mindset and the bold leadership required to sow the seeds of revolution in the minds of the people for the removal of social mores and bring about change. And he could make it possible. For this he had established a deep bond between the political thought associated with Gandhi, Nehru and Gopabandhu and literature. In this regard he was a front-runner.

Mahtab strongly believed that the scheduled castes people should visit the temple of Lord Jagannath. In this connection, he wrote on 20 April 1948 in the editorial column of *The Prajatantra*, "It is sheer stupidity to think that there is no relation between religious practice and administration. The administration can impose that reform which has got legal sanction as well as support of the society. Eradication of untouchability is a similar reform which has got the sanction of law, support of the people but this has failed to be fruitful only for a handful of reactionary people. There only the administration would interfere and continue the reform. Temple entry is the symbol of eradication of untouchability. Hence the temple door should open to one and all." It was his firm belief that the entry of untouchables would bring about a glorious synthesis of the Jagannath

culture and Gandhism. Mahtab wrote again and again against this so-called social evil in the name of God.

Mahtab was against cow slaughter and advocated its ban. He strongly held the view that it should be stopped for the simple reason that killing of any creature is bad. He also wrote a number of articles in *Gaon Majlis* column for imposing a ban on intoxicants. To express this view he wrote, "Before Gandhi started his struggle, the practice of drinking of liquor was prevalent in society as well as in the country. Country liquor was available in almost every village. Those in the upper class and in touch with foreigners were drinking foreign liquor. But, despite its consumption, it did not occupy a respectable position. Referring to the increase of consumption of liquor from top to bottom in the administration and the need for its total ban, he wrote, "To implement the legal ban on liquor consumption, it is essential that those who run the administration should totally abstain from it and there should be no official expenditure on it. For country liquor too, to control its circulation, permit and license should be issued. Otherwise, it would spread. By helping the students, donating to temples, clubs, schools and political parties, illegal liquor vendors have become established figures in society. Hence, public opinion should be directed against liquor, not against license."

Mahtab's contribution to the movement for the removal of social evils and stigmas is unparalleled. No other political leader in Orissa has made a contribution on the same scale. He was not a social reformer of the stature of Raja Ram Mohan Roy or Swami Dayananda, but he hit hard the social evils of post-independence society.

10

POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Dr Mahtab was intimately involved in politics throughout his life. Although his political ideology remained flexible, Mahtab was highly influenced by Gandhian ideology from the very beginning. He never deviated from the Gandhian Path of non-violence while taking part in varied political activities all his life. At the young age of 21 he plunged into the political struggle of India under Mahatma Gandhi's leadership and became the chief architect in making the Gandhian struggle in Orissa.

Mahtab took part in Kanika agitation, involved himself in the Nilagiri, Dhenkanal, Talcher and Ranpur struggles led by the Praja Mandal, and steered them in the Gandhian way in the Salt Satyagraha, individual *Satyagrahis* and in all other creative activities he participated.

Mahtab's singular contribution to nation-building was his effort to integrate the Gadjat states with India after independence. Democracy is essential to the development of a nation. Service to people is the foundation of democracy. In or out of power, whenever democracy was threatened, he raised his strong voice in defiance of democratic values. In this regard he was always bold and uncompromising.

The historian Manmathnath Das writes, "Democracy is not strengthened by those who for their selfish craving for positions compromise with their ideology. But people like Dr Mahtab have kept up the prestige of democracy." (The Prajatantra Saptahiki-13.01.1987).

In a democratic system, people's opinion receives the highest priority and this respected universally. Keeping this in mind, Mahtab always made a point of giving utmost weightage to the opinion of the masses. He never tried to impose his opinion on others. The main political weapon he wielded was the *Gaon Majlis* column. He always expressed his true, bold and uncompromising opinion through this column. For this he opined, "Unless the opinion of the masses is boldly expressed, the interest of the people is not safe in the hands of political parties."

When emergency was declared in the country by undermining the democratic system, Mahtab very boldly raised his voice against it. *Gaon Majlis* projected varied problems of the common people.

Newspapers play a pivotal role in a democratic system of government. In this belief, Mahtab started *The Prajatantra* and it played the role of a vigilant guard of democratic institutions. He always laid stress on removal of regional disparities, secularism and loyalty to the Constitution.

Although he dissociated himself from party politics, he was never out of politics. He is considered the 'Chanakya of politics.' During his long and distinguished political career, he had shaped his political consciousness. That was his dream to be strong and determined. In the words of the *Bhagavad Gita* "I am the doer. No other path than me." Many frontline leaders of Orissa politics believe that his life embodied the spirit of the aphorism.

Mahtab chose a political ideology of his own. And this he adhered to all his life. He never behaved in magical deeds. He analysed the relationship between philosophy and human action. His ideology integrated a Philosophy of life, humanism, nationalism, philosophy of struggle, and Gandhian values and gave his life its unique direction.

11

RELATIONSHIP WITH SATYABADI REFORMERS

As a student Mahtab was attracted towards Pandit Gopabandhu. He writes in his autobiography, "We heard that Pandit Gopabandhu Das had gone to attend the Congress Session and a District Congress Committee had been formed in Puri under the then Bihar State Congress Committee. We had also heard many stories about the Satyabadi School established by him. Many students of that school were then studying in our College. Gunanidhi Sahu was one ex-student of that school and was a boarder in our mess and was an intimate friend of mine. We also heard high praise about Acharya Harihar and Pandit Krupasindhu Mishra. I was then a regular reader of the weekly *The Samaj* edited by Gopabandhu. Its language was quite heart-touching. Gopabandhu waged a struggle against the local government officials who had grossly neglected in their duties in dealing with the famine in Puri. It left a deep impact on me. I think it was Pandit Gopabandhu who introduced social service in Orissa."

After their return from the Nagpur Congress Session the Congress leaders under the leadership of Gopabandhu Das spread the message of non-cooperation movement in their respective areas. A meeting of those Congress workers was convened on 13 March 1921 in Cuttack. The meeting was held in Satyabadi Mess premises in Sahebzada Bazar. The aim was to chalk out plans to work unitedly and form an organisation. Gopabandhu Das became the President of

Congress Committee and in the working committee Harekrushna Mahtab represented Balasore District. This Mess became the State headquarters of Congress and subsequently named 'Swaraj Ashram'.

Mahtab was first introduced to Pandit Gopabandhu during the Nagpur Congress Session. After becoming President of the Congress Committee, Gopabandhu toured different parts of Orissa and spread the message of non-cooperation movement. While going to Sambalpur on 21 April 1921 Gopabandhu broke journey at Balasore and stayed in "Swaraj Mandir" established by Mahtab. On 22 morning, he spoke to the volunteers and workers present there. In the afternoon a public meeting was held in the permit ground. In his speech Gopabandhu talked about the message of the Congress, the *charkha* revolution, the Tilak Swaraj Fund etc. In a meeting attended by Muslims he gave a speech about Khilafat. He also attended the Balasore District Congress Committee meeting and delivered a speech there.

All these meetings were arranged by Mahtab. In 1922, an agitation against the barbaric oppression of Kanika ruler was gaining momentum. The then King of Kanika informed the government that this was the handiwork of Congress workers. The government, without further investigation, tried to suppress this public agitation. Mahtab gave Kanika agitation leadership. Gopabandhu came to Bhadrak to take part in the conference. When his train reached Bhadrak station, section 144 was imposed and nobody was allowed to disembark from the train. But, before this notice was issued, they had already got down and Mahtab took Gopabandhu to Bhadrak Ashram.

The government had issued strict instruction that no meeting would be held on Kanika issue. But Mahtab convinced the Superintendent of Police, Hudson, that this was a close-door meeting and only a few members would

assemble for discussion. Thus, a meeting was arranged in the premises of a mosque in front of the 'Swaraj Ashram'. In this meeting Mahtab moved a proposal condemning the oppression by the ruler of Kanika. Pandit Gopabandhu's address made people emotional but the members of Balasore District Congress Committee did not approve of Mahtab's relationship with the police on the Kanika issue. Hence, after much hue and cry, the members tried to bring another proposal condemning Mahtab. But Mahtab insisted that this issue should be decided by the State Committee and, accordingly, the matter was forwarded to the State Committee. A State Committee meeting was held in Balasore. In the meeting Mahtab put forth his own point of view and a vote was taken. As there was a tie, Pandit Gopabandhu, who was presiding over the meeting, intervened and expressed his opinion that activities of 'Harekrushna' prove that whatever he did was honest in intention. Even if it has affected principles to some extent it is no doubt excusable." The matter ended there.

Right from Gopabandhu's time, there were two groups in Congress: the Satyabadi group, who were the followers of Gopabandhu from the very beginning and the admirers of Gopabandhu who were associated with him from the start of the non-cooperation movement. The latter included the educated young men like Gopabandhu Choudhury, Mahtab, Bhagirathi Mohapatra, Pranakrushna Padhiari etc. But Gopabandhu believed in unity in Congress organisation in Orissa. He therefore was the unrivalled hero of Orissa. Although Mahtab had differences with Gopabandhu on individual issues he respected him very much.

However, Mahtab was not very close to other members of the Satyabadi group. Especially, in politics, Pandit Nilakantha was his rival and he had differences with him throughout. But after the second general election in 1957, on his request, Pandit Nilakantha worked as the Speaker of

Orissa Legislative Assembly. In 1938, Pandit Nilakantha was the President of Utkal Pradeshika Congress Committee. In that election, Congress secured 36 seats. Although he secured the support of 21 members out of 36, Pandit Nilakantha could not become the leader. Biswanath Das was chosen the leader. Nilakantha believed that Mahtab was in the group which secretly tried not to let him lead the party.

Pandit Nilakantha had applied for becoming a member of the Central Assembly in 1947 and he had deposited a cheque for one hundred rupees for this purpose. After a few days, Mahtab wrote in a reply to this letter, "No doubt I would be very happy if you come to the Central Assembly. But, unfortunately Vallabhai Patel has instructed me that I should write informing you that you should not come to any assembly council. What can I do? You can understand my helplessness." Even, while Pandit Nilakantha's name was proposed by Mahatma Gandhi for Congress Executive Committee, Mahtab was nominated to the Executive Committee.

It is therefore clear that, for political reasons cordial relations did not exist between Mahtab and Nilakantha. In 1983, while writing in *The Jhankar* Mahtab assessed Pandit Nilakantha in the following words, "While assessing the life of a personality, always his or her distinctiveness should be highlighted. What distinguishes Nilakantha was that he was a true litterateur. His literary career is more important than his political career.

Only Nilakantha brought emperor Kharavela into Oriya literature. No one before him or after him did so. Writers are writing on Konark. But it was Nilakantha who introduced the builder of Konark, Narasimha Deva into Oriya literature. Nobody before or after him did that. His prose writings give him a place in Oriya literature which no one else can ever occupy. It is Orissa's misfortune that he could not become the successor of Gopabandhu. Had

it been so, the social life of Orissa would have been far richer."

Perhaps in politics, leaders of similar height and ideology don't thrive together. And this had happened in case of Mahtab and Nilakantha. No information on the relationship of Mahtab and other three members of the Satyabadi group is available.

12

AS OTHERS SEE HIM

Mahtab was a great political leader and patriot. This has been accepted in unison by many eminent political leaders, administrators and literary giants of India. On 11 November 1949 congratulating Mahtab, Sardar Vallabhai Patel wrote:

> A true patriot is who loves Orissa, loves India more and a political statesman and a born leader of men, Mahtab has carved out for himself a name which will live in Orissa's history.
>
> He has written how, more than ten years ago he conceived a future for Orissa which he had the good fortune to realise in his lifetime. He was a key figure in that drama, his enthusiasm triumphed over difficulties and his persistence succeeded. I am happy that I helped him to realise what was not only his dream but ambition of all Oriyas. I am still happier that it was that backward province as they call it which led the way for the rest of India to follow.

Chakravarty Rajagopalachari wrote:

> In the post-independent political history of Orissa, Mahtab will occupy a distinct place for his achievement.

Praising his role in the freedom struggle, Lady Mountbatten had written,

> Few men in India better deserved the highest recognition from friends and admirers more than

Orissa's Prime Minister Mahtab, whose contribution to the freedom and progress of the whole of India is well-known and widely recognised.

Pandit Nehru wrote in a letter to Mahtab:

A letter from you is quite a rare event and I was glad to have it. I am happy to find that Orissa, under your able and energetic leadership is making good progress. That is more than can be said of most other provinces.

On 1 October 1956, the then President Rajendra Prasad wrote to Mahtab:

I hardly need to assure you how much we have appreciated your service as the Governor of the big state of Bombay. The time when you have shouldered this heavy responsibility has not been free from trouble, and gives me great pleasure to be able to congratulate you on the way in which you have discharged your heavy responsibility.

Friend and comrade in arms Nandakishore Das wrote:

Dr Harekrushna Mahtab's lifelong service has found him such a place in the hearts of the people that no one can remove him from there.

In the words of Rajendra Narayan Singdeo, "He was destined to give others lessons in leadership."

What Freedom fighter Chintamani Mishra wrote for his half-a century span experience about Dr Mahtab is worth quoting here:

Today in the evening, I chanced upon Dr Mahtab. The affection and help I got from him was perhaps I have never got from anyone in my life.

Once I was quite close to Pandit Neelakantha. But

it always seemed to me that he maintained this relationship with the belief that I shall be some help to him. How much he benefited from his relationship with him was the yardstick of his affection. At least, you need not have to burden your mind to understand this. It was difficult to believe that Mahtab helped others for selfish ends. As far as foresight is concerned he was better than Pandit Neelakantha. My firm belief is that Mahtab was motivated by selfish ends. He does not do anything for his own benefit. I have heard from some people that Naba Babu is unhappy with me, because I take the side of Dr Mahtab. If he is unhappy for this, I am helpless. I really believed from the very beginning that Mahtab not Naba babu deserved to be the Chief Minister of the State.

Eminent humorist Faturananda presents Mahtab as the spin bowler of Orissa and narrated his only meeting with Chief Minister Mahtab in the following words:

When we went to meet him, Mahtab babu went away by saying that he (Mahtab) was coming within half an hour. He came after two hours and started his conversation by saying that he should apologise at first for this inordinate delay. It is a matter of grave injustice on his part to keep a writer of my stature without offering me anything to eat. If he knew that he would be delayed, he would have arranged everything for me.

I gave him two of my books. He opened them and read a few lines from each and asked me some questions regarding the book. Then he asked one of his assistants, "See how much money is there in my pocket." The assistant told him in an apologetic tone, "Sir, there is no money since yesterday." Mahtab said, "How can you say this? Any how, arrange at least hundred rupees." After some time the assistant came back bringing one

hundred rupees. Thrusting the money in my hand, he said, "I am really sorry not to give you some more money. But I shall certainly go through your books."

Mahtab was himself a creative writer. So he appreciated his fellow writer. If a thresher is taken to heaven, it would only thresh paddy. Likewise, wherever Mahtab remains, he would certainly appreciate writers.

13

THE END OF A JOURNEY

Mahtab breathed his last on 2 January 1987. This legend finally bade *adieu* to his countless followers and admirers in Orissa. On 21 November 1986, his 88th birth anniversary was observed and exactly after forty days he conquered death and achieved immortality. Mahtab did not fear death a bit. Hence on his 77th birthday he wrote a poem titled "Birthday".

Whether one is good or bad is known only after death
Why to worry beforehand for this Life?
Life is deathless,
Death is the completion of a chapter of one's life.

The chapter came to an end but he left a permanent mark on the consciousness of Oriya people. Obituaries arrived from different parts of the country.

"With his death, there came to an end of a great age. Dr Mahtab was one of the architects of modern India and a front runner among the freedom fighters."—former President Giani Zail Singh.

"The string is cut off from our relationship with the glorious days of freedom struggle."—former P.M. Rajiv Gandhi.

"A human perception to all the problems and expression of compassion towards the people of the downtrodden was the true identity of Dr Mahtab."—V.P. Venkataraman.

"The non-cooperation movement which was started by

Mahatma Gandhi in 1920, and those few, including late Pandit Gopabandhu Das, came forward to participate in the movement; Dr Mahtab was one of the leading members of that band. He had written 'History of Orissa' and his life itself is the history of Orissa. His fighting spirit would inspire the youths for ever." (Editor of the *Samaj*-Radhanath Rath).

Numerous people and institutions sent obituary notes on Mahtab. The great Socialist leader Surendranath Dwivedi observed that with Dr Mahtab's death, a huge *banyan* tree was uprooted.

Until his death, he continued to exert great influence on the political sphere and the public life in Orissa. In the political sphere he was a controversial figure. Yet he earned everyone's affection and respect.The integration of the princely states was one of his immortal contributions and, for this, he earned a distinguished place in the annals of modern India. His political acumen was recognised within and outside India. The President of Orissa Sahitya Akademi, Surendra Mohanty wrote, "The death of Dr Harekrushna Mahtab impoverished Oriya literature and public sphere in Orissa. The life of the leaders in the freedom struggle blended politics, literature, journalism, social service and mobilisation of people. Dr Mahtab was a leader of great stature. He excelled in each of these fields. Orissa Sahitya Akademi was established in 1957 when Dr Mahtab was the Chief Minister of the State. He himself was also the President of the Akademi for some time. He was interested to enrich contemporary Oriya literature in all respects. A writer like me and numerous other young writers of that period found a readership through the literary journal, *The Jhankar* and earned distinction. All in all, he was the father figure of all the writers in Orissa."

The oldest literary organisation of Orissa, Utkal Sahitya Samaj stated, "He was one of the valued members of Utkal

Sahitya Samaj. In his demise Utkal Sahitya Samaj lost one of its guardians."

"As the first President of Orissa Lalit Kala Akademi, Dr Mahtab was one of its pathfinders, who strove for the development of fine arts," commented Asit Mukherjee, the then President of Lalit Kala Akademi.

The socialist leader, Bankabihari Das wrote, "He was not a creation of history, but was the creator of history. He was a man making machine. A machine can only produce lifeless articles, but in the history of mankind very few great personalities have created human beings. Who is unaware that he created as many as four chief ministers. When people say a great tree of Orissa was uprooted, it is no exaggeration. But this great tree had a speciality, it receives all the nutrients from the soil to grow tall but it does not allow sunshine to fall on the earth. Nor does it allow even the grass to grow under it. But under the shade of a great tree like Mahtab, many luminaries could grow and flourish. No one can deny this. This accounts for his greatness.

The famous Oriya poet Satchidananda Routray said, "As a writer and a mentor of writers Dr Mahtab has earned a permanent place in the history of Orissa. There is little doubt about it."

The famous poet, Ramakanta Rath says, "A man of composed-wisdom he was unrivalled in his ability to express complex thoughts in simple language. He would be remembered with gratitude by numerous people like me throughout life."

The journalist Janabi Akhatar had presented him as "a rare personality of this age" and Nav Bharat Times observed, "At the age of 25, Dr Mahtab had earned a national identity for himself."

At last his mortal remains mingled with the immortal.

The last rays of the setting sun touched top of Ram Temple on 3 January 1987 at six in the evening. The trumpet

of the armed forces rent the air and the armed guards paid their last salute. *Hari Nam Satya Hai, Ram Nam Satya Hai* (Hari's name is the only truth, Ram's name is the only truth) – "long live Mahtabji"- was on everyone's lips. Every eyes were full of tears on that day in the premises of Mahtab's Agarpada residence. His Son, Bhatruhari Mahtab stepped forward to light the funeral pyre. The grand old man and the architect of modern Orissa, Mahtab's lifeless body lay on the funeral pyre. As the last ray of the setting sun faded, the pyre was lighted. And with the legendary figure, Dr Harekrushna Mahtab was reduced to ashes. And an era came to an end.

14

CONCLUSION

Dr Mahtab's biography would not be completed, unless his personality is evaluated from a right perspective. He had travélled in many ups and downs during his lifetime but he was not subdued. Influenced by the philosophy and call of Swami Vivekananda right from his childhood, he dedicated his life for the service of the nation. Dedication and service were the only principles of his life. Not only he himself joined in the independence struggle he also included his family in the same. He had gulped the rise and fall, royal enjoyment and humiliation like Neelakantha (Lord Shiva) drinking the deadly poison.

In the freedom struggle he accepted Gandhi as his leader. So he had tried to be guided by Gandhiji's principles and nobility. The motherland was first and foremost throughout his life. Right from his student days, he was very hard working and sincere and dedicated himself totally for the service of the nation. He was equally keen towards literature and history as well, for which he earned a good name as a creative writer and historian.

The steps he took to make Orissa a prosperous state in India would be written in golden letters in the history of Oriya people. He had applied his political power for nation building throughout his life. Power never controlled him, rather he controlled power and utilised it for creation of healthy democratic tradition and people-centred administration. He did not hesitate to experiment as many

ways as he could, to make democracy bold, people-friendly in the field of politics. For this, he had to endure a lot of hardship.

Dr Mahtab started the daily newspaper The *Prajatantra* to make people conscious about the rus that is affecting our social system. It was to rekindle the voice, strength and fighting spirit in people. He laid stress on publication of bold and impartial news to strengthen our democracy. To show their excellence, he had started a creative forum named "Visuva Milana" for the litterateurs, poets, writers, dramatists and artists to justify their role in nation building.

Mahtab is accepted by one and all as a freedom fighter, statesman, nation builder, littérateur, historian, social reformist and true friend, philosopher and guide of a common man.

He had profound belief and faith in non-violence. For this he fought for the communal harmony, democracy, and eradication of social evils till the last breath of his life.

Dr Mahtab had two weapons, sword and pen. He had successfully applied the method to improve social consciousness and bring social change through non-violence. And in this effort his pen had helped him a lot. He had applied his pen to bring social change, forging social harmony, and to strengthen the Indian as well as Oriya culture and tradition through literature and history. Mahtab was bold, outspoken and the founder of high human value. He was also a champion of democracy, and a true creative writer. He also laid foundation of true social commitment. He had not only built new Orissa, but also consolidated and enriched it. He opened a new path to flow this cultural consciousness in everyone's body. Mahtab loved his land, his state and the country very deeply for which he earned the reputation as a great statesman, nation builder and carrier of culture.

Mahtab served as a Central Minister, Governor and

Chief Minister. He associated himself with congress party during the freedom struggle but after independence he left congress party and formed a new party. He was also suspended from Congress Party on charges of anti-party activity. He also created a new history by forming the first coalition Ministry in free India. He was imprisoned during freedom struggle and after independence; he was also imprisoned during national emergency. He had embraced sufferings to happiness throughout his life.

The horizon of his social life was spread far and wide. He had formed Prajatantra Prachar Samiti and scores of other institutions. Nothing spared from his keen observation, right from arts to culture, literature, or sports whatever was necessary for the development of the state. It was his firm belief that the reality of social life was to raise public consciousness. He had proved this excellent art in all his words and deeds in a humanitarian way.

It is quite a tough task to gauge his literary and cultural horizon. Honours, rewards and awards followed him all his life. In 1983, he was awarded the Central Sahitya Akademi award with a special function organised by Central Sahitya Akademi at Bhubaneswar for his work *Gaon Majlis*. He was awarded with honorary Ph.D degree by Andhra University for writing History of Orissa. Prior to this, in 1955, Utkal University had conferred on him with D.Litt degree and Ph.D degree from Sagar University. As a creative writer he not only created works of literature but also scores of writers.

Mahtab was criticised as much as he was praised. But his complete personality was not stained a bit by this criticism, praise, award. Rather his personality was dazzled with a different hue by this.

Hence, he had become the true follower of Vivekananda, Gandhi and Gopabandhu.

Appendix

Important Events in Dr Mahtab's life

Birth:	21 November 1899.
Death:	7 January 1987.
Place of birth:	Agarpada, Bhadrak
Father:	Krushna Chandra Das.
Mother:	Tohfa Bibi.
Adopted father:	Jagannath Mahtab.
Wife:	Subhadra Devi.
Death of wife:	1978.
Education:	1917 - Matric - Bhadrak High School. 1919 - ISc. - Ravenshaw College. Joined active Politics while pursuing for B.A. degree.

1920:	Participated in Nagpur Congress Session.
1921:	Took part in Non-cooperation movement and jailed.
1924:	Elected as Chairman of Balasore District Board.
1926:	Elected as member of Bihar-Orissa Provincial Council.
1929:	Formation of Utkal Pradesh Congress Committee under the presidentship of Mahtab.
1930:	Participated as a member of National Congress Executive Committee. Took part in Salt Satyagraha and jailed.
1934:	Took part in the march from Puri to Bhadrak with Mahatma Gandhi.
1937:	President of Utkal Pradesh Congress Committee.
1938:	Chairman of Gadjat Inquiry Committee.
1939:	Accused in Bezelgette murder case and acquitted.
1940:	Took part in individual Satyagraha and jailed.

1942: Jailed for participating in "Quit India" movement and sent to Ahmednagar Fort Jail till 1945 and wrote *History of Orissa*.

1945 Transferred to Sambalpur jail and released.

1946-50: Became Prime Minister and Chief Minister.

15 December 1948: Merger of Gadjats with Orissa.

1950-54: Elected as Cabinet Minister, Industries and Commerce, Government of India.

1952-54: Secretary General of Congress Parliamentary Party.

1955-56: Governor of Mumbai Province.

1956-61: Became Chief Minister of Orissa for the second time.

1962-67: Member of Lok Sabha, Deputy Leader of Congress Parliamentary Party in Lok Sabha.

1967: Left Congress and formation of Jana Congress.

1971: Elected to Orissa Legislative Assembly.

1975: Jailed for opposing National emergency.

1983: Received Central Sahitya Akademi Award for *Gaon Majlis*.

List of Works written by Mahtab

Novels and Stories

1. Ajab Duniya - 1930.
2. Nutan Dharma - 1935.
3. Pratibha - 1946.
4. Tautar - 1946.
5. Abyapar - 1946
6. Trutiya Parva - 1977
7. 1975 - 1979
8. Trutiya Parva (Hindi) - 1994.
9. Swargare Emergency (Story) - 1972.

Autobiography

1. Sadhana Pathe - 1948.
2. Arab Sagararu Chilika - 1987.

Features and Articles

1. Gaon Majlis – 1st part - 1957.
2. Gaon Majlis – 2nd part - 1972.
3. Gaon Majlis – 3rd part - 1978.
4. Gaon Majlis – 4th part - 1981.

5. Gaon Majlis – 5th part - 1985.
6. Dasa Varshara Orissa - 1935.
7. Gandhiji and Orissa - 1969.
8. Odishara Sadhusantha - 1994.
9. Sesha Ashru (One Act Play and Prose) - 1948.

Poetry and Poetic Drama
1. Nigada Niswana - 1947.
2. Punyatma Gopabandhu Chasabhai - 1928.
3. Palasy Abasane (Epic) -1930.
4. Valmiki Ramayan, Srimad Bhagwad Gita. (Prose rendering) - 1930-32.
5. Chari Chakshu - (Epic) - 1942-45.
6. Kavya Natika - 1947.
7. Jivan Samashya - 1947.
8. Chhaya Pathara Yatri – (Poetry) - 1956.
9. Ananda Sandhane (Poem) - 1981.

Drama and One-act Plays
1. Swaraj Sadhan (Drama) - 1930-31
2. Yuga Sanketa (One Act Collection) - 1990
3. Rupantara - 1953
4. Itihasara Parichaya - 1949
5. Gantaghar - 1950
6. Bastabika - 1950
7. Mukti O Kukta - 1950
8. Prabanchana - 1953
9. Yuga Sanketa - 1953
10. Gupta Pranaya - 1950
11. Mamatara Anutapa - 1950
12. Uttarottara
13. Andhayuga

Criticism and Speeches
1. Sahitya Alochana - 1981.
2. Visuva Abhinandan - 1987.
3. Sahityara Marga Unmochana – 1st part - 1994.
4. Sahityara Marga Unmochana – 2nd part - 1994.
5. Sahityara Marga Unmochana – 3rd part - 1994.

Children's literature
1. Sri Ganeshanka Pathapada.
2. Vishnupurara Bhitari Katha.

Miscellaneous writings
1. Beginning of the End - 1974.
2. While Serving my Nation – Recollections of a Congress man– 1986.
3. Gandhi—the Political Leader - 1965.

Edited Newspaper and Magazines
Malaya, Dustbin (English), Swarajya Samachar, Prajatantra, The Eastern Times, Jhankar, Meena Bazar

Institutions
Prajatantra Prachar Samiti.
Visuva Milana.

Honorary Degrees Received
Ph.D from Andhra University.
D.Litt. from Utkal University.
Ph.D from Sagar University.

References

1. Sadhanara Pathe
2. Orissa Itihasa
3. Gaon Majlis, Part-I to Part-V
4. Sahityara Marga Unmochana, Part-I, II and III
5. Gandhi—The Political Leader
6. While Serving my Nation—Recollections of a Congressman
7. Dasavarshara Odisha.
8. All the Novels, Stories, Poems and Plays of Dr Mahtab.
9. Prajatantra, Silver Jubilee Edition.
10. Prajatantra Sapatahiki—13.01.1987.
11. Prajatantra- Golden Jubilee Smarak Volume.
12. Mahtab Golden Jubilee Abhinandan Volume.
13. Sahitya Sadhak Mahtab—Dr Ramakanta Behera.
14. Utkalara Ardhasatabdira Itihasa O Tahire Mo Sthana—Godavarish Mishra.
15. Atmajeevani—Pandit Nilakantha Das.
16. Smruti Anubhuti—Neelamani Routray.
17. Sri Nabakrushna Choudhury: Eka Jeevani—Chittaranjan Das.
18. Anirvana—Padma Charan Nayak.
19. Jhankar— February 1987.
20. Odishara Spin Bowler—Faturananda.
21. Harekrushna Mahtab and Freedom Struggle (1920-1942)—Soma Chhand.
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23. Konark—114th issue (Aug-Oct 1999). Orissa Sahitya Akademi.
24. Patha O Pruthibi—Surendra Mohanty.
25. Adhunikatara Ka, Kha O Ga. O Anyana Aluchana—Chintamani Behera.
26. Mo Jeevan Sangram: Ardhasatbadira Samajabadi Andolanara Kahani—Surendranath Dwibedi.
27. Bharat Abiskar—Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru.
28. Harekrushna Mahtab—Baishnab Charan Samal

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Harekrushna Mahtab (1899-1987) is considered as the builder of modern Orissa. He was a great freedom fighter, nation builder, social reformer, historian, journalist and literary genius. As the prime minister of Orissa and later chief minister and cabinet minister in the Central Ministry, his bold leadership is remembered mainly for his role in the formation of the new state of Orissa. Right from inspiring the common people of Orissa to join the freedom struggle, to introducing Orissa to the entire country in the post-independence era; he enriched it in every possible field. He created a cultural environment to spread its message through 'Prajatantra Prachar Samiti'. His farsighted leadership has left an indelible mark in the history of our country. This book is an in-depth study of the life and personality of Dr Mahtab, which is also the story of the contemporary Orissa.

Souribandhu Kar (*b.* 1948) is a well-known essayist, journalist, biographer and translator in Oriya language. He has to his credit a number of books on the philosophy of Swami Vivekananda, Gandhi and Marx. Shri Kar is also an activist, fighting for the rights of the labour class.

Suvash Chandra Satpathy has more than 25 titles of translation works to his credit, which includes works from Oriya into English as well as from major Indian languages into Oriya. He is presently working for the editorial desk of *The Samaya,* a leading Oriya daily. He has also translated a few titles for the NBT.



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